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ARGOSY

STORIES BY

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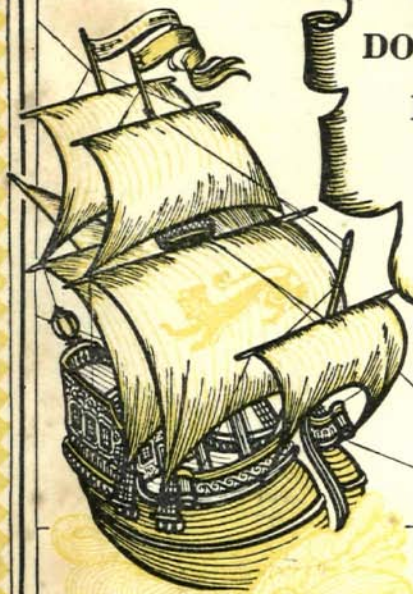
AND OTHERS



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ARGOSY

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White Wings

FROM the Round Pond this February morning
I hear the outboard flutter of wings on the water
And a sea-mew's siren.

Look where this grey gull, in the sunlight turning,
Circles the mainland and skims into harbour
Like a Catalina.

Ducks at the dockside, their brown hulls bobbing,
Cluster of masted swans, the long-shore sparrows,
Swarm on the tide-line.

Only this early boy, at my dream's ebbing,
Thrusting his white-winged yacht among the waders,
Scatters a seascape.

PAUL DEHN

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SUGAR FOR THE HORSE

"That beast," declared my grandmother, "will never come to bed in a house of mine!"

by H. E. BATES

MY Uncle Silas had a little mare named Jenny, warm brown and smooth coated, with a cream arrow on her forehead and flecks of cream on three of her feet. She was a very knowing, friendly creature and took sugar off the top of your head. "Go anywhere and do anything," my Uncle Silas would say. "Only got to give her the word. Go t' bed wi' me."

"Upstairs?" I said.

"Upstairs, downstairs," my Uncle Silas said. "Anywhere. Where you like. I recollect—"

"Start some more tales," my grandmother would say. "Go on. Stuff the child's head with rubbish. Keep on. Someday he'll know the difference between the truth and what he hears from you."

"Is the truth," Silas said. "She came to bed with me arter the 1899 Jubilee. Over at Kimbolton. I oughta know. There was me and Tig Flawn and Queenie White—"

"That's been a minute," my grandmother said. She was very small and tart and dry and disbelieving. "How old's the horse now? Fifty?"

"Well, she's gittin' on," Silas said. "I recollect that day Queenie had a big hat on. We got the hat off her and put it on Jenny and she come up to bed with me just like a lamb."

"Who was Queenie White?" I said. "Did she come to bed too?"

"I'm only tellin' on you about the horse," my Uncle Silas said. "Queenie was afore your time."

"It's a pity she wasn't before yours," my grandmother said.

"Ah, but she wasn't. Course," he said to me, "I could tell you a lot about her. Only you wanted to know about the horse. Well, she came to bed wi' me—"

"Did she?" my grandmother said. "Well, I warn you here and now she'll never come to bed in no house of mine."

Some time later my Uncle Silas came down to Nenweald Fair, on the second Sunday in August, about the time the corn was cut

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and the first dewberries were ripe for gathering, with Jenny in a little black trap with yellow wheels and a spray of ash-leaves on her head to keep the flies away. There was always a wonderful dinner for Nenweald Fair and Silas always kept it waiting. There was always roast beef and Yorkshire pudding and horseradish sauce and chicken to choose from, and little kidney beans and new potatoes with butter, and yellow plum pie and cream with sugar on the pastry. There were jugs of beer on the sideboard by the clock with the pictures of Philadelphia. The batter of the Yorkshire pudding was as buttery and soft as custard and all over the house there was a wonderful smell of beef burnt at the edges by fire.

But my Uncle Silas was always late and my grandfather, an indulgent, mild mannered man unaccustomed to revelry and things of that sort, was always full of excuses for him.

"Very like busted a belly-band coming down Longbays Hill or summat," he would say.

"Start carving," my grandmother would say. "I'm having no dinner of mine spoilt for Silas or anybody else."

"Hold hard a minute. Give him a chance."

"The meat's on the table," she would say, "and if he's not here that's his look-out," and she would plant the meat before my grandfather and it would sizzle in its gravy.

It was my Uncle Silas' custom, and my grandmother knew it and knew it only too well, not only to arrive late for that dinner but never to arrive alone. He had a habit of arriving with strange men with names like Tig Flawn and Fiddler Bollard and Slob Johnson and Tupman Jarvis.

That day he arrived, about two o'clock, when most of the meat had gone and the last of the yellow plums were cooling in the dish, with a man named Ponto Pack. I always wanted him to arrive with Queenie White and see what my grandmother thought of that but he never did and I was always rather disappointed. Whenever he did arrive my grandmother always looked as if she could hit him over the head with the pastry board or some other suitable instrument and that day, when I looked out of the window and saw Silas and the man Ponto, like some gigantic blonde sow, falling out of the trap, I felt the carving knife would hardly have been enough.

"Let 'em all come!" my Uncle Silas roared and gave prodigious beery winks from a bloodshot eye that was like a fire in a field of poppies.

"You're late," my grandmother said. "Get your dinner and stop shouting as if you were in Yardley Open Fields."

"Got hung up," Silas said. "Belly-band broke."

My grandmother gave my grandfather such a killing and

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merciless look that he went out at once to give Jenny a rub down and a drink of water and Ponto made strange strangled noises with whole potatoes and said, for the first of several hundred times :

" Onaccountable. Most onaccountable."

He was so large a man, bulging flesh as tight as bladdered lard into his suit of green faded Sunday black, that when the rest of us had left the table it still seemed to be full. His eyes, pink edged, beery, almost colourless, were uncannily like the eyes of a blonde and farrowing sow. He had nothing to say all day but :

" Onaccountable, George," or " Onaccountable, Silas. Most onaccountable."

In the afternoon it was very hot and everyone, including Silas, went to sleep in the front parlour or under the laurel trees and I played giving Jenny lumps of sugar off the top of my head in the little paddock at the back of the house. I was giving her the seventh or eighth lump of sugar and wondering whether she ever did go to bed with my Uncle Silas or whether it was just another story when my grandmother rapped on the window and said :

" Come you in out of that sun. You'll never stay awake tonight without you get some rest."

She must have known what was coming. About half past six my Uncle Silas and my grandfather and Ponto Pack had another jug of beer in the shade of the laurel trees and my Uncle Silas, wet lipped, bloodshot eye wickedly cocked, began to talk about " gittin' the belly-band mended while we think on it." It did not seem to me to be a thing that wanted thinking on at all and I do not think my grandmother thought so either. She had put on her grey silk dress with the parma violet stitching at the collar and her little high hat with michaelmas daisies on the brim and it was time now to be thinking of " walking up street ".

To walk up street on the Sunday of Nenweald Fair was a gentle, ponderous, respectable, long winded thing and it was something about which neither my Uncle Silas, my grandfather nor Ponto Pack seemed, I thought, very enthusiastic.

" You go steady on up," Silas said. " We'll come on arter we git the belly-band mended."

" If everything was as right as that belly-band nobody would hurt much," she said.

" It's too 'nation hot yit fer traipsing about," Silas said.

" Onaccountable hot," Ponto said. " Most onaccountable."

Ten minutes later the trap went jigging past us up the street, my Uncle Silas wearing his black and white deerstalker sideways on, so that the peaks stuck out like ears and Ponto, bowler hat perched on the top of his head like a cannon ball, looking more than ever like

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some pink eyed performing pig. My grandfather pretended not to see us and my grandmother said :

" What one doesn't think of the other will. The fool things."

We seemed to take longer than ever that sultry evening to make the tour under the chestnut trees about the crowded market place. I always got very bored with the gossiping Sunday starched crowd of bowler hats and parasols and I kept thinking how nice it would be if my Uncle Silas were to come back with Jenny and I could do my trick of giving her sugar, in full view of everybody, off the top of my head.

But Silas never came and by ten o'clock I was yawning and my grandmother had even stopped saying darkly, whenever there was something nice to listen to, " Little pigs have got big ears," as if I hadn't the vaguest idea of what she meant by that.

I went to bed with a piece of cold Yorkshire pudding to eat and fell asleep with it in my hands. It is hard to say now what time I woke up but what woke me was like the thunder of one crazy dream colliding with another at the foot of the stairs. The piece of cold Yorkshire pudding was like a frog crawling on my pillow, and I remember wanting to shriek about it just at the moment I heard my Uncle Silas roaring in the front passage :

" Git up, old gal ! Git up there ! Pull up, old gal ! "

There was a terrifying sound as of madly beaten carpets when I went to the top of the stairs. It was my grandmother beating Ponto Pack across the backside with what I thought was the stick we used for stirring pig-swill.

She could not get at my Uncle Silas because Silas was leading Jenny up the stairs and she could not get at my grandfather because he was lying like a sack of oats on Jenny's back. Ponto was pushing Jenny with his round black backside sticking out like a tight balloon and my Uncle Silas kept bawling :

" Git underneath on her, Ponto. You ain't underneath on her."

Every time Ponto seemed about to git underneath on her my grandmother hit him again with the swill stick. I thought he did not seem to mind much. He laughed every time my grandmother hit him and pushed himself harder than ever against Jenny's hind-quarters and called with pig-like fruitiness to my Uncle Silas, tugging at the bridle on the stairs :

" Can't budge the old gal, Silas. Most aggravatin', onaccountable."

" Get that mare out of my house, you drunken idiots ! " my grandmother shrieked.

" Gotta git George to bed fust," Silas said. " Must git George to bed."

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" Get that horse off my stair carpet ! "

" Gotta git George to bed. Good gal ! " Silas said. " Come on now, good gal. Tchck, tchck ! Up, mare ! That's a good gal."

By this time my Uncle Silas had succeeded in tugging Jenny a quarter of the way upstairs when suddenly, down below, sharp and sickening above the pandemonium of voices, there was a crack like a breaking bone. Ponto Pack roared, " Silas, she's hittin' me on the coconut ! " and at the same moment Jenny had something like hysterics, whinnying terribly, and fell down on her front knees on the stairs.

My Uncle Silas yelled, " Why th' Hanover don't you git underneath on her ? She'll be down atopt on y' ! " and for a moment I thought she was. She gave a great lurch backwards and my grandfather let out a groan.

My grandmother hit Ponto another crack on the head with the swill-stick and suddenly the whole essence of the situation became, to me at any rate, splendidly clear. My Uncle Silas and Ponto were trying to get my grandfather to bed and my grandmother, in her obstinate way, was trying to stop them.

I remembered in that moment the cold Yorkshire pudding. I fetched it from my bedroom and went halfway down the stairs and held it out to Jenny, most coaxingly, in the flat of my hand.

Whether she conceived, at that moment, that I in my white nightshirt was some kind of newly woken ghost or whether she decided she had had enough of the whole affair I never knew. Ponto had hardly time to bawl out from the bottom of the stairs, " It's most onaccountable, Silas. I can't budge her ! " and my Uncle Silas from the top of the stairs, " Hold hard, Pont. The old gal's knockin' off fer a mite o' pudden ! " when my grandmother, aiming another crack at Ponto's head, hit the mare in her fury a blow above the tail.

The frenzy of Jenny's hysterical ascent up three steps of stairs and then backwards down the whole flight was something I shall not forget. My grandfather fell off the mare and the mare fell sideways on him and then my Uncle Silas fell on the mare. The three of them fell on my grandmother and my grandmother fell on Ponto Pack.

My Uncle Silas yelled, " Let 'em all come ! " and my grandmother hit Ponto twenty or thirty blows on the top of the head with the swill-stick.

When my grandfather fell off the horse's back he landed with a terrible crash on the umbrella stand, and the portrait of Gladstone fell down in the hall. The cold Yorkshire pudding fell down the stairs and I fell after it.

My aunt came in the front door with a policeman and Ponto

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yelled, "It's onaccountable, Silas, most onaccountable!" just as the mare broke free and charged the sideboard in the front room.

My Uncle Silas sat on the bottom of the stairs and laughed his head off, and I began to cry because I was sorry for Jenny and thought it was the end of the world.

* * *

SPORTING TIMES

The game's the thing—though the odds seem ever against the players here. Can you recognize them? Count one mark for the sportsman, one for the source and one for the author in each case. The answers are on page 159.

1. *In spite of his good friends' efforts to show him the folly of his ways, this "Terror of the Highway", with his passion for speed and his blustering ways brought upon himself a sentence of twenty years for furious driving.*
2. *An hour on the ice—after a substantial lunch topped off with cherry brandy—can be uncommonly slippery, as this pompous and "orkard gen'l'm'n" found to his pain and humiliation.*
3. *To be invited to play croquet with royalty is an honour indeed, but this guest found it a mixed blessing, since both mallet and ball had a life of their own, and players were in constant danger of decapitation.*
4. *Hide and seek was the game they played in that palatial house—when the butler's mistress came to tea—but for the child it was leading to the fall of a beloved idol.*
5. *Typing a biography with one's head is perhaps no ordinary sporting event—but with as diverting a character as this lady's to draw upon, there's more fun in it for a cockroach than a treacle tin.*
6. *A very sporting Scotsman this, "he rode all unarmed, and he rode all alone—he swam the Esk river where ford there was none"—and the abducting of a bride was all part of the day's work.*
7. *Here today and gone tomorrow—that's the sailor's way, it seems, but these, Southward bound, left half their pay behind for the Bowery ladies, enough and to spare for a silk gown apiece.*
8. *In the Forest Sauvage, hunting was such a problem for the Master of the King's Hunt—what with stray unicorns and the Questing Beast, with the head of a serpent, the body of a leopard, the haunches of a lion, and a voice like thirty couple of questing hounds—not to speak of dragons.*
9. *All he wanted was a bit of plywood and a few nails, some white linen material by way of padding—and lo, a Trojan horse in modern dress!*

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OF THAT EARLY WORLD

She knew he was there—lurking somewhere in the mangrove swamps, waiting for the dark

by DOROTHY COTTRELL

STILL holding the week old newspaper, Virginia said firmly, "Don't be stupid! Of course you must go!"

Howard, her husband, lit his pipe and looked towards the launch. "I'd certainly like to!" His face, tanned and reddened to strong contrast with his fair hair, almost bleached eyebrows and clipped moustache, was eager but hesitant. "If I could be sure you'd be all right . . ."

She knew there was not the slightest doubt in his mind that she would be all right. He was used to the wilderness and to loneliness in the wilderness in half the jungles of the world, and it was one of his jokes that the farther away from civilization you got, the safer you were. His concern was simply for the fact that she was less familiar with it, and he did not yet know how many silly notions she might still have about solitude.

What he was actually saying to her was, "Are you sure you won't be silly and be scared?" Because he loved her, he would not have her frightened, no matter how foolish he might think it.

She said, "Run along! You'll be back tomorrow night."

He was pleased with her. "I would hate to miss Doctor Halsted . . . If we'd only known sooner, we could have got someone to look after the things."

She pushed him towards the boat. "We didn't know. Scram! Happy snails, darling!"

For it was a conference on *liguus*, the brilliant and beautiful tree snails, that he wished to attend. They had learned of it only in the copy of the paper she held, and he would just have time to get to Miami by taking the launch to the Overseas Highway and catching the bus. They could not leave the camp untended, for Howard's cameras and specimens represented thousands of pounds and months of labour. And passing fishermen might be tempted by a deserted camp. So far as personal danger went, there wasn't any. It was absurd of her to feel this inward sinking at the thought of being alone. She thought, What did you expect, my girl, when you married a naturalist?

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Certainly Virginia could have expected no greater happiness than he had given her. He was all she had dreamed; a fine man, a truly unselfish man. Simply because she had seen that other paragraph in the paper that he had not noticed, she was not going to deprive him of one of the very occasional things that he did want for himself, if the thing he wanted was the rather bizarre treat of a conference on snails!

Starting the launch, he said approvingly, "I know how to pick 'em when it comes to wives!" He leaned over to kiss her where she stood in the dinghy. Then the propeller turned in the blue-green transparency and the launch began to slide away. He waved. "Take care of yourself!"

She shouted derisively, "Have a slug for me!" They waved companionably. Then the launch was a diminishing blot and she poled back towards the Cape. Franzy, their huge, newly bought and lion coloured mastiff, was sitting at the ripple-line, waiting for her.

Virginia said, "Well, Franzy, we're on our own!" Franzy gave a bark like the booming of a small cannon. Then she turned from the evening radiance of the Bay of Florida and the thousand miles of open ocean towards the west, to look earnestly at the towering mangrove forest that backed the splendid beach. Her hackles slowly rose until a stiff fin of hair stood up along her back, and she growled deeply and worriedly. Virginia, standing in the last flame of the sun where she had pulled the dinghy up, experienced a sudden chill. She said, "That's right! Take advantage of it and scare me to death!"

The big dog moved her position slightly, her eyes still intent on the great wall of distant foliage; and this time she rumbled through all her body. She even showed signs of starting off to investigate the thing that had annoyed her. Virginia said, "Oh, no you don't! You stay with me!" And she snapped the lead on Franzy's collar. Her hands were shaking as she chained and locked the dinghy to the huge, half-buried hardwood root that told of past hurricane. Gradually Franzy's hair smoothed and she indicated that the danger had retreated. Virginia jeered, "What was it? A cotton mouse?"

They had not owned Franzy long enough for the deep and passionate affection of dog and master to have arisen between them, but their relations were cordial. Virginia patted Franzy, and felt comfort in the broad and beautiful back. Then she unrolled the newspaper again and re-read the paragraph she had not shown to Howard.

Wilson, on his way to Miami to be tried for the brutal murder of Miss Parks last November, escaped from the police car

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while Deputy Nolan was changing a flat tyre on the Tamiami Trail last night. Wilson struck Deputy Nolan with the back of an axe from the toolbox, obtained the keys to the handcuffs, but was interrupted by the approach of a car before he secured the unconscious Deputy's gun. Police Chief Hammond says that there is almost no chance that the fugitive can elude capture, and posses are now combing the Everglades. Deputy Nolan is reported to be improving at The Memorial Hospital.

Virginia's mind considered the paragraph carefully. It did not say in what direction the man had fled, and there was a great deal of Everglades. There was nothing but her own cowardice to suggest that he might have come towards the wild land of the Cape. Wherever he was, he did not have a gun, but he did have an axe. Well, she had Franzy and a good revolver. The paper was a week old. The man was probably safely behind bars long before this. Women in the past had stood off hostile Indians while their husbands went about their business. She had not been going to stop Howard from attending his conference just because a week ago a murderer had broken loose forty miles away!

But she wished that Franzy had not growled, and that, as a result of it, she, too, had not felt the watching quality of the mangroves.

Carefully gathering the day's specimens from the boat and arranging them in the carrying bucket, Virginia tried to turn her mind to the beauty and wonder of the place and its ancient mysteries which had captured even her untrained interest.

On the snowy beaches, storms flung rare and vivid shells, so that at times the frail white angels' wings were heaped in ricks. Thousands of islands were woven with green channels. Abandoned Indian camps were still marked by patches of the small and sweetly delicious Indian pumpkins. Ancient shell mounds and platforms held remains of primitive and beautiful pottery, the skeletons of lost peoples, occasionally bright trade beads brought in hands of mailed Spaniards; certain of the mounds being so vast as to form islands of many acres and the flat country's sole notable elevations above sea level.

Because they were self preserving, their exact age could not be guessed, but Howard had once laughed and said that if some catastrophe wiped out modern man, an archæologist ages hence might find them better preserved than the crumbled remnants of great cities and believe that they post-dated the white man and his cities.

Earlier still, great creatures of the early world had ranged here,

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driven southward by the advance of the glaciers in the ice ages. And she wondered if weak man, his further southward progress blocked by the seas, had found himself oppressed and terrified by their numbers and their savagery.

Howard had a great respect for man of that early world, a weak creature, perhaps newly descended from the trees to walk upright, confronted by a ravening world of monsters whose strength and size surpassed his by hundreds to one, yet already armed with the frail spark that would make him master of the world and perhaps master of the stars, the ability to reason and to dream.

"Think of him, Virginia!" Howard had said. "Such a little fellow, no armour-plated scales, no foot-long fangs or yard-long tusks, no weight to shake the forests as he passed—and facing a world of fang and tusk and claw that struck at him in the dark and swooped at him from the air and gnashed at him from the sea! He'd have given up, if he hadn't known even then that he had the thing to beat them all, if he just thought hard enough."

At the moment, this still existing world of sea and jungle was perhaps more beautiful than she had ever seen it. The Gulf of Mexico wove its surface softly like coloured silk, but at her feet the water turned clearly blue to reveal the alternately wavering and darting passage of fish, the wash of whose fins struck up little puffs of snowy sand. To the southwest there was a single and huge thunderhead of purest lilac, edged with evening gold. The pure sweep of the sub-tropic air was clean with thousands of square miles of sea, and the thousands of square miles of the great water-prairie of the Everglades had touched it with hints of the sweetness of seeding grasses and blooming plants. She knew that about their camp, which was on the prairie edge beyond the belt of the mangrove forest, there would be a shimmer of almost unearthly light. Grave pelicans, and perhaps even a sunset-tinted flight of pink ibis might pass, and there would be the whisper of wind across a swamp that was pure and fresh as a mountain pool, wonderful with ancient life.

Shaking off her fears, she shouldered the cameras and specimens, picked up her sack of crawfish for supper, and started for the mangrove wall, through a quarter of a mile of which the trail passed. Her feet and the feet of the dog made a clean crunching in the purity of the sand. It was no wonder that Howard so loved such places. It was absurd to be alarmed because the nearest settlement was ten miles away and unreachable save by boat! She even tried to take a scientific interest in her sensations. In her husband's presence, the mangrove forest was simply mysterious and interesting, the loneliness delightful. Just because she was for the first time in her life absolutely alone, cut off from all human

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contact, the twilight beach and glimmering sea spoke only of danger, and the mangrove wall seemed to watch her. Probably Franzy, also being feminine, had reacted in the same way.

A hundred yards from the mangroves that were darkening with evening, she stopped to make sure the revolver in her belt was working smoothly and had not developed one of its sudden coats of rust. She smiled at the remoteness of her having to use it, but its presence and efficiency gave her a sense of confidence and courage. Franzy's lead lay across the palm of her hand as she twirled the chamber of the revolver.

Suddenly, giving her a shock of terror, the lead began to race across her hand. She grabbed for the leather loop, missed it, and dropped the revolver into the powder-soft sand.

Scrambling to her feet, she grabbed up the sand covered gun and called, "Franzy!" But the dog was running low and fast towards the mangroves, breaking into a gallop interspersed with roaring barks as she went.

Virginia called desperately to her, but Franzy only swung her tail to show that she heard, but doubted her mistress' judgment; then, making as much noise as a pack of dogs, she had vanished where the trail entered the mangrove forest.

Virginia ran after her, and was perhaps seventy yards from the leafy entrance of the trail when there was a faint and leaf muffled thump, a single short yelp, and silence.

Virginia stood shaking. Then she made herself call the dog; pinning her hope on Franzy's tonguing reappearance. The sounds that had preceded silence had been so slight! But she knew that a shout or even a shot could hardly be heard from within that walled room of foliage. She knew that the thump had been a blow; the yelp, Franzy's dying cry of agony.

An electric prickling covered her body from her feet to her scalp. It was not in itself an unpleasant sensation, but she knew that terror was on its heels . . . Something had happened to Franzy. What? She had heard that there were still panthers in the area, and there might even be bear for all she knew. Perhaps Franzy had tangled with one of them? But she knew that this was merely hope, for she would not be so frightened of bear or panther. Her mind said of the hardly audible thump, *An axe.*

Virginia thought clearly. She could reach the boat and be to sea before anything came out of the mangroves towards her. She could be safe. But she could not run without even trying to learn what had happened to Franzy. The dog might still be writhing in agony, it might even still be possible to save Franzy, who had been

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trying to defend her . . . Nor could she desert the camp, perhaps to have it ravaged and wantonly burned.

She shook the revolver to free it of sand and wiped it roughly against her slacks, then, holding it in her hand, she moved towards the mangroves.

She thought, *At least I'll never be more frightened than this ! If I get through this, I'll at least know that I can take it !*

After the first few feet, where the leaves brushed her shoulders, the forest opened below because of its own density. She waited until her eyes were adjusted to the faint light that was green at noon but leaden now. Then she went slowly forward, studying every trunk, every great air-root, every shadow before she passed it.

She called, " Franzy ! " And here her voice had a distorted hollowness as if in a many arched room. There was no answer save the muffled quality of stillness that is peculiar to forests.

She had expected to find Franzy's body on the trail, but soon she knew that she must have passed the place from which the sounds had come ; that something must have pulled Franzy's body from the trail. She continued to call boldly as if looking for the dog, but when she emerged from the labyrinth she knew that Franzy and the thing that had killed her were still in the wood. The relief of the light was incalculable, and while she hesitated for a moment as to whether she should still go back and search on either side of the trail for the dog, her reason told her that Franzy was beyond help.

She went through the little barren of scrub and rock and came out on the stretch of short grass that surrounded the camp. The air had the fading shine of gold wine, and to the north the marshes rippled in the evening wind . . .

Somewhere under the evening stars, Howard was happily and unknowingly on his way to Miami ! And the impossibility of reaching him and her longing for the strength and safety of his presence almost unnerved her.

Then Virginia went into the tent that was big and comfortable, with its large canvas roofed screen porch and walls of screening. Behind it was the storeroom of solid canvas, lined with shelves for the equipment and specimens.

She was already in the tent when she had the thought that someone might have preceded her and be in the storeroom. She lit the lamp, raised it above her head and went cautiously to the door, looking through it on an angle to both left and right before she stepped within. Fortunately it was not hard to determine that the room was empty. She now faced only the problem of the

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night. As yet there was enough light outside to prevent her from feeling the nervousness of being in a lighted space surrounded by the dark. Presently she would have to decide whether to keep the spurious comfort of the lamp or to make herself less vulnerable by becoming part of the darkness. She decided upon the latter course. It would be wise to keep her eyes accustomed to the darkness, so that she might be able to see as well as anything that came out of the darkness towards her. After all, she had the advantage. She had a revolver. The man had only an axe. She had just to keep her head.

As a precaution before turning down the light, she would bring out spare ammunition and check the revolver again. She brought the heavy box of bullets to the table in the screen porch, put her torch beside it, also a box of matches in case the torch failed. She set the lamp handy, added a butcher's knife—she did not quite know why—then looked at the revolver.

The same slow yet rapid wave of tingling passed over her at the thought of what could have happened in the forest, for the barrel of the revolver was jammed with sand! She must either have dropped it barrel first or scraped it through the sand as she picked it up when Franzy ran away. If she had tried to fire it, it would have failed to work or, more likely, exploded in her hand.

She found that she was trembling violently at the knowledge of her recent helplessness, and knew that Howard would have thought this foolish. In one of the narrow escapes they had already had in the boat, he had laughed and said that so long as a thing came out all right he wouldn't worry about it; that most of the really bad things that nearly happened to us we didn't know about, such as all the deadly germs we nearly swallowed or the splinters that thought of giving us tetanus and didn't. Well, this had come out all right. She had only to clean the revolver as quickly as possible.

The darkness was deepening outside, and caution prompted her to carry the revolver and the lamp into the specimen room so that no watching eyes could see that the gun was out of action.

At the end of ten minutes, she knew that the matter was more serious than she had thought. The mechanism of the revolver was always heavy to her hands, so that normally she could just break it and no more. Now the airy emery powder of the sand had entered between the metal surfaces, adding a friction that she could not overcome, and something more than sand—perhaps a shell or a coral pebble—had entered the barrel. She could not clear the barrel from the forward end and she could not break the gun to remove the chamber or get at the barrel from the rear.

She had, she found, been wrong in believing that she could

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never be more frightened than she had been as she had entered the mangroves. She had not even known terror then, but she knew it now. If the man came, she could not stop him! He could lift the screen-flap and walk in! She stood shaking, while small beads of sweat ran down her forehead. And for the first time she knew the beauty of walls—wooden walls, stone walls, any walls! But between her and the night was only the gently swaying canvas and frail screening. She was now quite helpless except for the man's possible fear of the gun that she knew would not work, but that he would think could.

She considered how much she might rely on this. But she did not even know if she could calmly face the man while knowing that the gun in her hand was of no more use than a toy. In any case, the man was desperate. He had been hiding in the swamps for seven days. Here, in the camp, must be in his eyes all the things he wanted: food, coffee, a weapon, clothes, and perhaps money to aid in his further flight. Men had come up against guns before and for less reason. With the inducement of all the things he wanted, he would take great chances. And she was helpless!

She had a moment of cowardice in which she thought of slipping beneath the rear wall of the tent—holding to the hope that he was not already crouched against it—and fleeing into the darkness of the marshes to hide amongst the snakes and swamp things that normally she feared. Oh, to be safe, so safe, in a dark pool where only snakes or alligators might come! Howard had said that wild things almost never harmed men unless they were provoked. She would be quite still and unprovoking! She would dart now to get the knife and the torch and be gone into the swamp!

Unexpected pride and a deep and growing anger checked her. She had been too frightened until now to envisage the man as anything but the root of her fear. Now he became the enemy. He had ruthlessly killed poor blundering and innocent Franzy, had killed that other and unknown woman. In her mind, she became in a way the champion of that other and slaughtered woman, who perhaps had been loved as she, Virginia, was; had wished to live as she did. The man should not come unopposed into the camp that was the scene of happiness. He should not ravage amongst Howard's prized possessions; perhaps in a final gesture of destruction, fire the camp! She thought, *But how can I stop him? He is like a savage wild animal, and what strength have I to oppose him? What can I do?*

Her mind reverted to the picture of the young world, in which confronted by limitless savagery, man had pitted his strength against forces which made his the strength of an insect. Only there remained his one desperately held quality, the ability to think . . .

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She might still out-think the man in the swamp!

If she remained where she was, she might during the night free the gun. She might, if the man came before it was freed, be able to hold him off. But she doubted both these things. If she took the bolder course that had now jumped into her mind, she must act quickly. Trying to think as the man might think, she went quickly about the tent, gathering various items into a sack. Then she picked up the outboard motor for the dinghy, a can of petrol and her large torch. Having finished the preparations for her plan, she did not know if she had the courage to carry it out.

She encountered, also, the unexpected difficulty of addressing the perhaps empty darkness. It was, she found, almost impossible to speak to what might be miles of emptiness. Then she got her voice under control.

She said loudly and clearly, "Listen, Wilson, I know you're here. If you try to come near me, I will shoot you. If you keep away from me, you may be able to escape. I am going to the boat, and will put there clothes and food and the outboard motor and a can of petrol. I will put money and a bottle of whisky there too. As I put them in, I will hold the torch on them so that you can see them. I will not go away in the boat myself, for I don't want to leave my husband's camp. What I want is that you go away. I have to go myself to the boat, because you can't start the outboard motor when it's cold, if you don't know it. After I have started it, I will get out of the boat and walk away along the beach until I am too far from you to shoot you. I know that you would like to get my gun, but if you try to get it or come near me I will kill you and you will never get away!"

She opened the screen-flap, turned the torch slowly in every direction, then walked forward, slowly turning the beam of the torch about her in all directions. Every sixty yards or so, she repeated her statement to the miles of silence, and a profound sympathy for radio announcers rose irrelevantly in her mind. It was almost incredibly difficult to keep saying the same thing over and over with fitting firmness and conviction.

She made small variations. "Do you understand? There it will be, everything you need to get away! . . . If I had meant to go myself, I would have gone this evening. It didn't matter to me that the engine wasn't in the boat. But you need the engine, and it will be running for you! With the outboard motor, you can go for miles to where the police are not looking for you . . . Remember, I will kill you if you come near me—and even if you managed to kill me, you couldn't start that engine unless you were very, very lucky . . . What I want is that you go away. I am

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not going away, because we have things in the camp that are of value to us—but not to you. All you need will be in the boat. It's your best chance!"

As the towering wall of mangroves rose before her, golden green in the little spot of the torch beam, black against the stars, a new terror beset her. Suppose that it had not been the man who had killed Franzy, but some huge and savage animal? Suppose that ancient hunger, impervious to carefully reasoned speech or the power of a dead gun, was waiting for her in the forest? Suppose the torch should suddenly pick out flattened ears, bared fangs and pink mouth? And the gun in her hand of no more use than a chip, and the knife at her belt little better!

She was already feeling the weight of the things she carried, and her knees nearly collapsed under her. She considered setting the things down where she was and telling the man—if there was a man—that he must take them and try to start the engine himself. But he might not yet have heard her, and it was most unlikely that he could start the temperamental engine.

Her torch was less effective in the forest; it created great shadows for every area of light. She continued to utter her reasoned words to the changing dance of shadows and twisted trunks and swinging air-roots.

She also knew that the forest had been unnaturally still. Normally, if entered by night, it was full of small paddings and rustlings and sleepy flutters as roosting birds adjusted their plumage. Something in addition to herself was in the forest, and had been there, disturbing the teeming activity of the night. Some twenty feet from the end of the wood, she repeated her statement with particular clearness, shining the beam of the torch back down the trail, a wild and beautiful corridor through the black. But as instantly as she turned to go forward, she heard a faint sound that was less a sound than an impact of weight behind her. Again her legs almost gave way.

Then she was walking across the lovely snow of the beach, on whose white surface her torch picked out every tiny shell. She put the things in the boat, holding them up one by one in the light of the torch, then she turned to the darkness behind her. She said loudly, "I have put the things I told you about in the boat. If you are close enough, you have seen them. Now I am going to shine the torch on the padlock of the chain that holds the boat so that you can see that it is still fastened. This is the key with this label on it! See! I have thrown it in the sand near the lock . . .

"Now I am going to slide the boat far enough into the water

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for the propeller to clear—and then I will start the engine. If you are thinking of trying to stun me by throwing a rock or a hardwood stick at me, don't! I'm expecting it—and I'll dodge, and I've still got the gun!"

After some four minutes of effort, she started the balky engine, and the noise terrified her, for she had depended on her ears as much as her eyes for her safety, and now she could hear nothing but the engine. Stepping on to the sand, she called, "Now I will walk away down the beach until you know that I am too far to shoot you. I still know that you would like this gun, but there is very little chance that you can get it without my killing you, so you had better go without it!"

She walked to the east along the strip of firm wet sand at the edge of the softly stirring sea. When she was perhaps three hundred yards along the shore, she turned and sat down, doing perhaps the most difficult thing she had yet done in letting the torch shine on her as reassurance to the man that she was attempting no trick by creeping back to shoot at him or by aiming from where she was with some previously cached rifle, letting him be undistracted by any movement, encouraging him to go and go quickly. Minutes passed that were agony of years.

Her straining ears could hear nothing save the staccato popping and racing of the engine. She began to be convinced that all her art had been wasted, that either the man had not heard her or that it had never been the man but some unknown thing in the deep woods.

Perhaps the man was even now raiding the camp? Perhaps her reasoning as to the man's reactions had been wrong and he was even now stalking her? Perhaps the man did have a gun, or even a rifle, stolen during the days of his flight, and having let her start the engine for him, he was now taking aim to kill her? Perhaps, on the other hand, a great animal was crawling towards her?

The terror held; then suddenly and unbelievably the sound of the engine altered, hesitated, steepened, and began its droning power song across the night. He had heard her! He had done what she wished! He was going away across the dark sea!

She snapped out the torch, collapsed against her own knees, and began to sob in the ecstasy of relief.

She returned to the beach, that was cool in purple storm-shadow, as Howard's launch appeared the next day.

He was waving to her and shouting happily, "I got one! I stopped off at the big hammock and found one! A blue *liguus* with the triple band!"

Then he looked about in surprise. "Where's the dinghy?"

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She said, " You'll have to wade. It's gone."

He assumed with perhaps unflattering instancy that she had lost it. He was as promptly comforting. " We'll find it. Don't look so stricken, Boatman ! " In a moment, he had splashed ashore through the water that was pale, pure green today. " Here, take a look at it ! " He placed the small, exquisite shell in her palm, caught her face between his hands as his eyes approved her.

" It's a present for you. It's going to be named for you. *Liguus virginia.*"

She thought wildly, *I've been through the terrors of hell—and I get a snail named after me ! For all the things that will happen to me through the years, across the jungles of the world, I'll get snails and insects named after me ! And he's been looking for that snail for ten years and it's his dearest treasure, and he's given it to me—and I wouldn't have it any other way than to try to go on deserving my snails !*

She smiled. " Thank you, darling ! It's a wonderful present ! Oh, thank you so much ! "

She took his hand as he would have led her up the beach. She said calmly, " Howard, we'll have to send for the police . . ." She told him of what had happened, and saw his sorrow and anger for the dog, and his fear at the thought of what might have happened to her, that this time was not overcome by the fact that it had come out all right.

She finished her recital, " It was dreadful losing Franzy like that, but at least she didn't know about it. And I'm sure they'll find him without much difficulty. I put a stiff dose of laudanum in the whisky, and it's pretty certain he's out for the count."

He turned her to face him, staring with wonder and admiration into her face. " Can I pick 'em when it comes to wives ! " He held her fondly. " I'll have to take better care of you ! "

* * *

ON THE MARK

One day a newspaper reporter was sent to interview a man who was supposed to be a super-marksman. All over the place, on trees, fences and walls, were bull's-eye targets with holes in the dead centre, as evidence of his uncanny skill. The reporter was astonished when the dead-shot turned out to be the village half-wit.

" You certainly are a wonderful shot," the reporter said, admiringly. " How do you do it ? "

" Easy as pie," answered the dim-witted rifleman. " I shoot first and then draw the circle."

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TEN POUND DIVE

This was a rumour that had to be probed to the bottom

by BARRY PEROWNE

IT was noon of a blazing day in a small North African town. The fronds of the date palms and the lower lips of the camels hung listless in the heat. From the glassy glare of the bay sounded the boom of a ship's siren.

Tod Bailey, a gangling, tow-haired individual in white flannels and a yellow sports shirt, heard the reverberant note as he retreated, crouching, across the office of the Chief of Police.

By profession, Tod was a little known writer of totally unsolicited articles. One of his eyes, now, was closed; the other, blue and intent, sighted through the range-finder of a small camera.

"That looks jolly good, Chief," he said. "Hold it."

The Chief of Police, a bulbous, swarthy man with grey hair *en brosse* and a waxed moustache, sat at his desk in an attitude of forensic dignity. Ambitious, a zealot, noted for hair-trigger suspicions and impulsive handcuffs, he was the most detested official between Casablanca and Cairo.

"So," he said, relaxing his rigidity when Tod's camera had clicked, "I am to appear in a London magazine, in a special article, yes?"

"A special, unsolicited article," confirmed the enthusiastic freelance, gilding the lily. "All we want, to put it over, is a tie-up, a story to go with the pictures. Something colourful. How about it, Chief? There must be some queer doings in a hole—a wholly romantic place like this. Slinking, robed figures, eh? Bricks of hashish fiddled from hand to hand?"

"People in this town 'oo fiddle bricks of 'asheesh," said the Chief of Police sternly, "*p'fui, gaol!*" His gimlet eyes probed the papers on his desk. He picked out a printed circular. "Now, 'ere is something," he said. "Now, if this type 'ere would only come in my area to be roughly seized, that would be a sensation, no?"

He handed the circular to Tod, who looked at the photographs, a front view and profile, of a man with a flattened nose and malevolent eyes. Seen from whatever angle, he was ill favoured. His

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name was Havatta, his speciality armed robbery. Wanted by the police of a West African port, he was stated by the authorities there to be trying to escape northwards by sea.

"It'd make a nice story, if you were to catch him, Chief," Tod conceded; "but miracles don't happen." The ship's siren droned deeply again, and he frowned. "Which ship's that?"

"The *Santa Corinha*," said the Chief of Police. "She radioed, a few hours ago, that she was in trouble. She ran down a small vessel, in a 'eat mist, and cut 'er in 'alves. Both segments sank immediate, but all 'ands is saved. The *Santa Corinha* 'as put in 'ere to land the survivors."

Taking up a pair of binoculars, he went across to the window. Tod followed. The shutters stood open. Beyond huddled flat roofs flapped over by a white dazzle of washing a rust-red old tramp steamer lay at anchor in the bay.

"Which vessel did she sink?" Tod asked.

"The *Zammouri*," said the Chief of Police, "privately chartered in Tangier, with a skipper and crew of two, by a countryman of yours, a Professor 'Orne Barringer, for entomological research in West African rivers."

He handed over the binoculars. Focusing them on the *Santa Corinha*'s deck, Tod gave a startled whistle.

He was gazing into a pair of grave, violet, dark lashed eyes beneath a pageboy fringe. So close seemed the guinea-gold young face, in its frame of smooth raven hair, that the red lips might have been talking directly, even intimately, to himself.

The Chief of Police made as though to button his white jacket, a project so clearly impossible as to make the gesture mere bravado. He put on his Panama instead, and remarked, "I'm going to look into this matter."

Tod lowered the binoculars with the air of a man mazed by mirages. "I'll come with you," he said. "The situation has possibilities."

Over the harbour, heat currents quivered visibly. A launch from the *Santa Corinha* was chugging shorewards. On the quay, old Juzeed, the snake-charmer, squatted on henna stained heels. He met every ship in the hope that it might set sightseers ashore to shower baksheesh on a ballet of cobras.

He wore a grimy turban, a nether garment resembling divided skirts, and a cast-off battledress blouse bearing the insignia of a C.Q.M.S. His scimitar nose jutted from a whorl of kapok-coloured whiskers. At the sight of the Chief of Police, whom he hated for chronic victimization, he snarled sidelong, and fingering a rudimentary flute, blew a snake-charmer's curse.

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This emerged as an eerie wail, which had a disturbing effect on a sack lying before him in the dust. The sack stirred. Growing restive, it made irascible heaves, bulging out first on one side, then on the other, finally towering up in a passion, only to totter and collapse.

Tod regarded these contortions with lukewarm enthusiasm, and turned with relief to the launch, now sending its bow-wave in a rippling ellipse along the wharf wall.

Out on to the steps jumped a small, active, dehydrated man in a black alpaca suit—unquestionably, Professor Horne Barringer. On his probably bald head, the entomologist wore a handkerchief with a knot at each corner. He had a walnut face and a grey tuft of beard that jerked testily as he aired, for the benefit of a thin man in white ducks, the grievances of a shipwrecked savant. The thin man's demeanour of melancholy scepticism marked him down as a practitioner of marine insurance.

Up the steps, behind the men, came the girl. Tod photographed her reverently. In a blue shirt and white skirt, with her pageboy bob, she was cool, calm, unhurried.

"Affidavits?" Professor Barringer was demanding of the thin man. "Certainly you shall have affidavits. Very nearly drowned, the five of us. Cut in half. Down like a stone. Everything lost. Specimens that took me months to collect. All my black-japanned, watertight, airproof specimen boxes—four large boxes—gone! Caterpillars, cocoons, butterflies, gynandromorphs—beautiful freaks, sir—gone, sunk! Insurance? Tchah! Imponderable values—irreplaceable—a loss to science—"

The girl said mildly, "There's the question of our clothes, too, Grandfather."

"Clothes? Quite right, Jessica! You hear, sir?" demanded the Professor. "You realize I'm ruined? I put into this collecting trip such lifetime savings as I've been able to spare from an entomologist's paltry pittance. It's been my dearest ambition to carry out a field expedition in my own way, unhampered by the niggling and piggling of museum nincompoops. And what has it come to? Fiasco! Everything lost, beyond hope of salvage by a ruined man. A pauper, sir! Look at us—not a stitch but what we stand up in!"

But attention was diverted just then, from the plight of the *Zammouri* castaways, by a languid cobra flopping across the Chief of Police's foot. The bulky official recoiled with a yell of horror. Incensed, he pointed Juzeed and his sack of serpents the way to gaol. The snake-charmer bared rebellious, pink gums in a snarl of whiskers.

Professor Barringer intervened. "Let the man be," he said.

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" They do no harm, these fellows. Naturalists, in their own way. Native lore, you know."

He asked Juzeed a question in Arabic. The snake-charmer nodded. Appeased by recognition of a kindred spirit in the Professor, he reached out a stringy arm, seized the truant cobra and applied a torsion behind the jaws. They yawned open on a nightmare of crescent fangs, and the Professor stooped for a good look inside. Evidently he relished it, for the two old gentlemen exchanged nods of mutual esteem.

Tod photographed the scene; it had flavour. He already had snapped the two Moors who comprised the *Zammouri*'s crew, and now he turned for a good shot of the skipper.

His name, it seemed, was Mifsud. He was a short, fat, dark man wearing a diminutive yachting cap on a fine crop of oily curls. His teeth projected slightly under the eaves of a ragged moustache, giving him an ingratiating expression. This yielded to such a look of sly dismay, when he saw the camera trained on him, that Tod wondered fleetingly if the skipper of the foundered vessel *Zammouri* had anything on his conscience.

Subtler hints, in the past, had led Tod to some of his most exceptional unsolicited articles. But now he had Jessica Barringer on his mind.

The skipper and the two Moors, their affidavits having been sworn, were shipped home to Tangier within a few days, as distressed seamen. Less fortunate, Jessica and her grandfather were stranded pending the arrival of money from England, and Tod saw much of her.

His cordial, enthusiastic temperament responded to her calmer, more reflective nature, and the dark, self possessed girl with the pageboy bob and the gangling, tow-haired young man soon became a familiar sight in the more picturesque corners of the town.

One afternoon, sitting in the gardens of the Sultana's palace, Jessica said thoughtfully, " Tod, I believe you know the Chief of Police, don't you ? "

"As only an interviewer can," admitted Tod, who was on his knees, trying to get an angled shot of her against slim, rose-hued pillars framing a cloudless blue sky.

" Grandfather's money came yesterday," said Jessica. " There's a ship due soon, and he wants to book our passages home on it. Fortunately, our passports didn't go down with the *Zammouri*, but the Chief of Police still has them. Grandfather went to ask for them yesterday, but for some odd reason the Chief was quite evasive."

There was a shade of worry in her violet eyes as she looked at

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Tod. "You know the Chief personally," she said. "I wonder if you could somehow sound him, and find out why he's reluctant to give us our passports back?"

The Chief of Police was never too busy to see the Press. Large, swarthy, inscrutable, he sat at his desk, twisting up the skewers of his moustache and studying Tod with gimlet eyes, as the unsolicited journalist delicately broached the passport question.

"So you 'ave 'eard nothing?" said the Chief of Police at last. "You 'ave 'eard nothing of this rumour going round the bazaars, Mr. Bailey? This rumour about the sinking of the *Zammouri?*"

"Rumour?" Tod asked blankly.

"I see you 'ave 'eard nothing," said the Chief. "But *I* 'ave, Mr. Bailey—and if I 'ad 'eard it earlier, I wouldn't 'ave let the skipper and the 'ands go. It is a rumour that must be probed to the bottom."

Tod felt anxious. "But what on earth is it?"

"Not what on earth," corrected the Chief of Police—"what in the sea, Mr. Bailey?" He studied Tod grimly for a moment.

"All right, I will speak to you, off the record, strictly in confidence. Mr. Bailey, you said the other day that miracles don't 'appen. P'raps not. But there's a very strange rumour going the rounds about there 'aving been a certain party aboard the *Zammouri* 'oo was travelling clandestine, not entered in the log—a certain party 'oo either was kept 'id below, or 'oo would 'urry below if any other ship was near, and 'oo, when the *Zammouri* was struck and sank instantly, 'ad no time to get out and went down with 'er!"

It was a startling notion. "Who's this certain party supposed to be?" asked Tod.

"Use your 'ead," said the Chief of Police, "as I do. 'Oo do we know 'oo was in a 'urry to leave West Africa, quick and secret, and 'oo would pay 'igh for a clandestine passage?"

Tod glanced involuntarily at a printed circular on the desk—a circular bearing photographs, front view and profile, of a man with a flattened nose and malevolent eyes.

"Yes," said the Police Chief harshly—"'avatta! And 'oo do we know 'oo near bankrupted 'imself to go on a bug 'unting trip? Professor 'Orne Barringer, my friend! A fanatic about butterflies and beetles. A scientist don't bother 'imself with scruples. All 'e cares about is 'is science. 'E needs money, and 'avatta offers 'im a tidy sum to bring 'im up round the north coast 'ere. The Professor takes the money, and shares it with Mifsud and the two Moors. When 'avatta goes to the bottom, they all agree to keep their mouths shut."

"I can't believe it," said Tod. "If Havatta paid high for a

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passage, where's the money? The Professor came ashore broke."

"The money went to the bottom, no doubt," said the Chief of Police. "The Professor probably 'ad 'is share 'id away in 'is four black boxes, under the beetles and butterflies. Mr. Bailey, there's a dead man there in my territorial waters. 'E 'as to be answered for. Professor Barringer is 'ere under my 'and."

He showed Tod the hand; it resembled a hassock. "And 'ere 'e stays," said the Chief, "till we 'ave 'im—like *that!*"

He clenched the hand on the hapless wraith of a venal entomologist.

The entomologist himself, when Tod returned to the small hotel where Jessica and her grandfather were staying, was trying his skill at snake-charming. Before the flat roofed, narrow house, which was comprised of fourteen rooms placed one on top of the other with a tiny balcony under each shuttered window, the Professor sat crosslegged on the cobbles under a date palm.

Encouraged by Juzeed, the testy little savant with the handkerchief knotted at the four corners of his head was alternately blowing into the snake-charmer's flute and muttering crossly to himself when the serpents failed to respond. They lay about in scaly torpor on the cobbles, watching him balefully.

"Most extraordinary," said the Professor. "I can't get a bend out of 'em, Bailey. They seem to stiffen up as soon as I start to play. Yet Juzeed here, remarkable old miscreant, can send them into transports with a well blown note. Interesting instance of native lore. Care to try your hand?"

He proffered the flute. It was his eyebrows that made him look irascible. The eyes with which he glanced up at Tod held the blue guilelessness of one who had spent a lifetime gazing on the hundred-legged wonders of natural history. It was difficult to believe that he could be a party to whatever crime might have disgraced the voyage of the ill-starred *Zammouri*.

But Tod was worried. To aid the escape of a criminal, and then suppress the fact of his demise, was a grave matter. The Professor's legal position was hazardous. Yet Tod could give him no warning. The Chief of Police had spoken under the seal of confidence.

All Tod could say to Jessica that evening was, "I shouldn't worry too much about the passports. There's some red tape nonsense."

"I don't understand it at all," said Jessica, frowning.

Watching her, Tod asked, "Have you ever heard of a man called Havatta?"

"Why, yes," Jessica said. "There was a huge fuss going on about some desperado of that name. Why do you ask?"

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" Oh, just that I see they haven't caught him yet," said Tod. She was innocent of any knowledge of shenanigan aboard the *Zammouri*. He would have staked his life on that.

Alone in his room that night, with the crickets seething under the moonlit palms outside, Tod studied the photographs he had taken at the landing of the *Zammouri* survivors. Especially he studied the photograph of Mifsud, sly, crafty, ingratiating!

He took the photograph to the Chief of Police.

" There's your man, Chief," he said. " If Havatta was aboard, it was with the connivance of Mifsud. The Professor and his grand-daughter knew nothing about it."

" A bird in the 'and," said the Chief, " is worth two in the bush for purposes of practical police work. To fetch Mifsud from Tangier would involve extradition proceedings. Professor Barringer is on the spot. Investigations are proceeding."

The Chief of Police was confident. He was complacent. He had something up his sleeve, but Tod didn't guess what it was until late the following afternoon.

He had spent the day getting some photographs of Jessica at an oasis out in the desert. They were returning in a ramshackle hired car driven by a man in a tarboosh, and the heat dazzle of the small harbour had just come into sight below, when Jessica exclaimed, " Look, Tod! There's the ship Grandfather and I were hoping to leave on! "

A small, rust-red passenger vessel lay at anchor in the bay. Nearby lay another boat at anchor. There was something queer about its shape.

Tod said, " I wonder what that other one is? It came in just as we were leaving this morning. It looks odd, somehow."

" That? " said Jessica. " I've seen one like that before. That's a salvage vessel."

Tod sat up with a shock. " A *salvage* vessel? "

" Why, yes." Her violet eyes looked at him in wonder. " What's the matter? "

It had just dawned on Tod what the Chief of Police had been up to all these days. Because there had been no prospect of the *Zammouri*'s insurers undertaking expensive salvage operations, Tod hadn't given salvage a thought. But the Chief of Police, to establish a case, must establish a *corpus delicti*. He must have hired a salvage vessel from some other port. Diving operations must have been going on for days. And if the vessel had now come into port . . .

Tod said grimly, " Jessica, I'll drop you off at the hotel. If your grandfather's not there—"

" Not there? "

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"Don't worry," Tod said. "Just don't worry about a thing. I'll come to you as soon as I can."

He was haunted by the bewilderment in her eyes as he left her at the hotel and had himself driven to police headquarters. He was haunted, too, by a vision of a certain dismal something, dripping salt water and festooned in seaweed, brought in by the salvage ship.

He glanced quickly, apprehensively, round the Chief's office, in search of the macabre object of his vision. He saw no such horror. He guessed instantly it would be over at the morgue. The Chief of Police was alone in the office. He stood there huge and glum by his desk, ineffectively trying to fasten his jacket.

Tod steeled himself. "Well, Chief?" he said. "I see you've had diving operations carried out. What—what did they find?"

"Nothing," was the reply.

Tod put a hand on the desk-edge. Relief made him feel suddenly enfeebled. "Nothing?"

"Nothing," the Chief of Police said mournfully. "No 'avatta! No sign of 'im or 'is remainder aboard the *Zammouri*. 'Undreds and 'undreds, in police funds, spent on 'ire of salvage ship, and carrying out operations, and nothing to show for it. No 'avatta. No money in the four black boxes—just bugs and beetles. It is a strange affair. The rumour was very strong. It was all round the bazaars. I 'ad to act."

Tod felt as though a great weight had been lifted from his shoulders. "Does Professor Barringer know about the diving operations?" he asked.

"Yes, 'e 'eard," said the Chief. "'E was in 'ere this morning, asking for 'is passports. I 'ad to give them to 'im. 'E's leaving on the ship sailing at sunset."

"Sunset?" Tod exclaimed. "Excuse me, Chief!"

Jessica and her grandfather already had left the hotel.

Tod had to move quickly. Within twenty minutes, he was packed, had his ticket, and was climbing the accommodation ladder from the launch to the ship.

Jessica met him as he stepped on deck. She wore her white skirt and blue shirt; the waning sunshine was radiant on her pageboy bob.

"Grandfather simply *hustled* me aboard," she said. "I thought I'd seen the last of you. What was the trouble about, Tod?"

"No trouble," said Tod. "A false alarm."

"I'm so glad," Jessica said, "because everything's turned out marvellously. Grandfather's got his specimen cases back, with all those months of work in West African rivers quite intact."

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"He has?" said Tod.

"Yes," said Jessica. "The Chief of Police, of all people, had diving operations carried out that the insurers wouldn't undertake, and Grandfather couldn't possibly finance himself. And they brought up the specimen cases, for some reason. Grandfather made the police, as salvors, an offer for them. They knew that nobody else out here would offer much for bugs at auction. So, as Grandfather was leaving tonight, they drew up some papers in a hurry and accepted his offer, to set against their salvage expenses. Grandfather's delighted."

She glanced fondly along the deck.

"Ye gods," said Tod, staring, "what's Juzeed doing aboard?"

The entomologist and the snake-charmer were sitting cross-legged on a hatch, aft. Nearby lay four large, flat, black-japanned boxes and a dusty sack which heaved ambiguously. The entomologist still wore a knotted handkerchief on his head. The turbanned snake-charmer had promoted himself from a C.Q.M.S.'s battledress blouse to a Regimental Bandmaster's; perhaps he felt his flute entitled him to the distinction. The two old gentlemen had their beards confidentially together, muttering away in Arabic.

"Isn't Grandfather crazy?" said Jessica. "He says Juzeed did him a great favour. He wouldn't like him to get into trouble over it, so Grandfather's taking him home with us. He says Juzeed might be useful on future expeditions. Think of having a snake-charmer about the house!"

But what Tod was thinking, as delighted cackles from the venerable cronies came floating along the deck, was that, supposing one wanted a rumour started around the bazaars, few people were in a better position to be helpful than a popular snake-charmer.

"May I ask," Tod said slowly, "how much Grandfather offered the police for the return of his four black boxes?"

"Ten pounds," said Jessica. "Of course, it wasn't *much* to set against all the expense of their diving operations, whatever their reason for carrying them out. It was all Grandfather could afford, though, and he paid it cheerfully."

She smiled at Tod. "Grandfather would pay away his last penny in the interests of Science."

* * *

BORDERLINE CASE

A drawing of Stravinsky by Picasso, on its way to an exhibition in the Near East, was once held for two days by customs officers in the Balkans. They insisted it was a plan of their frontier fortifications.

Everybody's

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OVER THE BORDER

To the land of glens and mountains grey,
Of marléd seas — and a thousand isles —

When simmer brings the lang bricht e'en,
I'll daunder doun to the bowling green,
Or delve my yaird and my roses tend
For the big floo'er show in the next back-end.
Whiles when the sun blinks aifter rain,
I'll tak my rod and gang up the glen ;

Me and Davie, we ken the püles
Whar the troot grow great in the howes o' the hills ;
And, wanderin' back when the gloamin' fa's
And the midges dance in the hazel shaws,
We'll stop at the yett ayont the hicht
And drink great wauchts o' the scented nicht,
While the hoose lamps kindle raw by raw
And a yellow star hangs ower the Law.

Davie will lauch like a wean at a fair
And nip my airm to mak certain shure
That we're back frae yon place o' dule and dreid,
To oor ain kind of warld—

JOHN BUCHAN, 1875-1940

With A Vengeance

While staying in a small country town in England, it happened that Sir Walter Scott suddenly required medical advice for one of his servants, and enquiring if there were any doctor in the place, was introduced to a grave, sagacious-looking personage, attired in black, with a shovel hat.

To his utter astonishment, Sir Walter recognized him as a Scots blacksmith, who had formerly practised, with tolerable success, as a veterinary in the neighbourhood of Ashestiel.

" Can it be possible that it is John Lundie ? " exclaimed Sir Walter. " Surely you were a horse doctor before ? However do you get on ? "

" Ou, just extraordinary weel," admitted John. " For your honour maun ken my practice is vera sure and orthodox. I depend entirely upon *two* simples—*laudamy* and *calamy* ! "

" Simples with a vengeance ! " replied Scott. " But John, do you never happen to *kill* any of your patients ? "

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" Kill ? Ou ay ! May be sae ! Whiles they die, and whiles no. 'Tis the will o' Providence ! Ony how, your honour, *it wad be lang before it makes up for Flodden* ! "

JOHN GIBSON LOCKHART, 1794-1854, *Life of Sir Walter Scott*

My Bonnie Lass

To you let snow and roses
And golden locks belong.
These are the world's enslavers,
Let these delight the throng.
For her of duskier lustre
Whose favour still I wear,
The snow be in her kirtle,
The rose be in her hair !

The hue of highland rivers
Careering, full and cool,
From sable on to golden,
From rapid on to pool—
The hue of heather-honey,
The hue of honey-bees,
Shall tinge her golden shoulder,
Shall gild her tawny knees.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON, 1850-1894

She

Throned on crags, Edinburgh takes every eye ; and not content with supremacy in beauty, she claims an intellectual supremacy also. She is a patrician amongst British cities, " A penniless lass wi' a lang pedigree." She has wit if she lacks wealth : she counts great men against millionaires. The success of the actor is insecure until thereunto Edinburgh has set her seal. The poet trembles before the Edinburgh critics. The singer respects the delicacy of the Edinburgh ear. Coarse London may roar with applause : fastidious Edinburgh sniffs disdain, and sneers reputations away. London is the stomach of the empire—Edinburgh the quick subtle, far-darting brain.

ALEXANDER SMITH, 1830-1867

And Yet . . .

" *Sir, let me tell you, the noblest prospect which a Scotchman ever sees, is the highroad that leads him to England !* "

SAMUEL JOHNSON, 1709-1784

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To Mary, Queen

She was skilled in music and the dance
And the old arts of love,
At the court of the poisoned rose
And the perfumed glove,
And gave her beautiful hand
To the pale Dauphin
A triple crown to win—
And she loved little dogs
And parrots
And red-legged partridges
And the golden fishes of the Duc de Guise
And a pigeon with a blue ruff
She had from Monsieur d'Elbœuf.

Master John Knox was no friend to her;
She spoke him soft and kind,
Her honeyed words were Satan's lure
The unwary soul to bind.
" Good sir, doth a lissom shape
And a comely face
Offend your God His Grace
Whose Wisdom maketh these
Golden fishes of the Duc de Guise? " . . .

Consider the way she had to go.
Think of the hungry snare,
The net she herself had woven,
Aware or unaware,
Of the dancing feet grown still,
The blinded eyes.
Queens should be cold and wise,
And she loved little things,
Parrots
And red-legged partridges
And the golden fishes of the Duc de Guise
And the pigeon with the blue ruff
She had from Monsieur d'Elbœuf.

MARION ANGUS

Sir!

" As Doctor Johnson never said, is there any Scotsman without charm? "

J. M. BARRIE, 1860-1937, *in an address at Edinburgh University*

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RUN FOR YOUR LIFE

"There is no choice," he said, "remember that"

by JOHN SAVAGE

I STARTED out that morning with all the willingness in the world. It wasn't even dawn yet, but I didn't take a torch. I always enjoyed making my way along the overgrown ditch path in the dark.

Nothing much happened all the way to Collins Creek. Coyotes howled a couple of times, once very close to me, but that was all. By the time I reached the creek it was daylight.

The spring rains had become too light to do the orange trees any good, and it was the time to start the summer irrigating. The wheel that operated the head gate of the creek was like the steering wheel of a car, except that it was made of iron. I gave it fifteen or twenty turns, and the creek water shot out of the big pipe in a welter of foam. I waited a minute, then walked a few paces down the ditch to make sure enough water was getting through.

I ran down the ditch until I caught up with the muddy front wave, where it was tumbling along over the dry concrete. The front of water moved about as fast as a man's brisk walk. For me, since I wasn't very big yet, it meant a jog trot. The water was already carrying a lot of twigs and leaves, but not nearly enough to stop up the ditch. I let it go, and trotted along the path beside it, watching the flood overwhelm thousands of ants and dozens of beetles. The lizards were too quick for the water, of course, and darted away long before it reached them.

By the time the water had gone a couple of hundred yards, it was pushing along a great load of twigs and brush, and it was beginning to slow up and run deeper. I jumped into the ditch just ahead of it and went to work with the pitchfork, tossing all the big stuff up on the bank and letting the leaves go on by. After I had the ditch clear I had to run again to catch up with the front of water.

I had cleared the ditch for perhaps the third or fourth time when I saw the white cottontail rabbit. I was running down the path, hurrying to catch the water. I remember I was just passing the big sycamore tree that marks the north-west corner of my father's land. The cottontail, very startled, jumped out from under a bush at the base of this tree and raced ahead of me down the path.

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I didn't know what to think of him at first. A cottontail rabbit is supposed to be grey-brown, except for his little powder puff of a tail, but this animal was as white as snow all over. Also, this one was a baby, hardly bigger than a gopher, although a lot prettier. For a second I didn't know what he was. But there is nothing in the world that moves like a scared cottontail. The ears go flat down along the back of the neck and the hind legs work together, driving the rabbit in a scooting, zigzag course, his white tail bobbing up and down.

This little fellow was scared of me and desperately looking for cover all the time. He shot about twenty yards down the path and then cut to the right—me after him—and went splash, right in the middle of that spearhead of rolling water. He rolled over in it twice and then I saw him come up in the calmer water behind the front wave and try to swim. He could stay up all right, but he was too terrified to be satisfied with that. He kicked his hind legs as hard as he could, time after time, trying to jump to the moon.

I hopped into the ditch, and picked him up. He struggled wildly for a second, kicked twice more, then gave up and concentrated on trying to make himself as small as he could.

He was small, all right. He was hot and white and soaking wet, with his heart pounding against my hands as if it were his whole body beating. I saw with amazement that his eyes weren't brown, as a cottontail's should be, but a sort of delicate coral pink, very like the insides of his ears. He was very scared, and I loved him very much. I shoved him inside my shirt, and started running again to catch the water.

I got ahead of it again and worked like a demon, pitching out the rubbish fast, but being very careful not to injure my little rabbit. I found a dead grass snake and what was left of a pheasant, mostly skeleton and feathers. Both these animals smelled quite a lot, and I was in a hurry, so I didn't pay them much attention—just pitched them up on the bank with the rest of the rubbish.

I got to our own pipeline just barely in time to shut the head gate. Then, leaving the water to spill down the canyon for an hour or so until it should clear up, I went to put the pitchfork away in the barn.

My father was in there, sharpening the sheepshearing clippers. I unfastened one button of my shirt and gently pushed the little rabbit part way out, so that just his head showed. Holding him like that with one hand, I walked over to my father and said, "Look!"

"Good heavens! Where'd you get that?"

"Rescued him from the ditch." I was looking down at the rabbit and stroking his head between his ears with the end of my finger.

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"I wonder where he could have come from," my father said. "Nobody keeps rabbits round here."

"He's no tame rabbit," I protested. "He's a cottontail!"

My father said, "Naw." But when I opened my shirt further and let him see, he had to admit it. "By golly, so he is! I never knew there was albino cottontails."

"Al-what?"

"Albino. It's when an animal comes out white. Been known to happen with almost every species there is, but I've never seen it in a cottontail before. That's a very rare animal you've got."

I shoved the little head back in my shirt and buttoned the buttons. This was a very rare animal and I wasn't going to risk letting him get away.

I walked out of the barn and over to the hutches I had along the shady side of the house. There were three hutches, all empty now. My last pet had been a screech owl, and he had died over a month ago, after refusing to eat a bite from the moment I caught him.

I opened the middle hutch, which was made out of two orange boxes joined and screened, and placed the little cottontail inside. Then I got some lettuce and a dish of water and put them in with the rabbit. "Eat some, Benjy," I commanded. But Benjamin wasn't hungry; he pressed himself down in a corner, behind the lettuce leaves, and trembled in silence. I decided I'd better go away and let him get used to his new home.

When I got back to the barn, my father was busy shearing the big curly-horned ram. He had the ram upended between his knees, and the fleece was rolling off thick and golden, with the clean side out. He was a very good shearer, and it took him only about a dozen minutes to finish with the ram.

As soon as he was done he dropped the shears, stood up to rest his back, and said, "Jimmy, how about taking this old-timer back to the corral and bringing me another?"

I did it—came back pulling a last year's lamb by the hind leg. My father went to work shearing and I went to work on the big fleece from the ram. I spread it out on the floor, tossed the loose tags of wool on to the centre, then gathered it into a ball and tied it with the special paper twine you use. I hadn't quite finished when we heard a car coming up the lane.

Not many cars came up our lane. My father and I both stopped working when we heard it. The car drove up through the farmyard and stopped about ten yards from us. It was a brand new station wagon. The man in it was somebody I couldn't remember ever seeing before. He got out of the car, leaving the door open, and started walking towards us.

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I glanced at my father and saw his mouth drop open. "Jeff!" he whispered, not even loud enough for the man to hear him. I don't think my father even knew he'd said anything. I'd never seen him so dumbfounded.

The tall man came towards us slowly, the morning sunshine behind him.

When he got into the barn he approached my father and held out his hand part way, as if he didn't know whether my father would want to shake it or not.

My father grabbed the hand solidly, and put his other hand on the man's shoulder. "Jeff!" he said again.

"Yep," the tall man said.

I could see that he had a friendly smile, but he looked tired. Under the black stubble on his face the skin was milky white, as if he hadn't been in the sunshine for a long, long time.

My father said, "I—I thought you were in for life. Did they let you out?"

Jeff looked at him, smiling tensely. "You might say that's exactly what they've done," he said. Then he cleared his throat. "I see you're shearing."

My father nodded. "Hot weather coming up. Got to."

"Mind if I help?"

"Not a bit. Give you twenty cents a fleece."

"It won't matter about the pay," the tall man said.

He took off his coat and hung it on a nail, and I saw that his right shirt sleeve was splotched with red. He walked out to the corral, captured an old ewe and bullied her over into the barn. There he bent her neck across his thigh, held her head under his elbow, and went to work, starting on the neck. The ewe struggled for just a second, and then settled down and started munching on Jeff's pants.

"Cut the bitin', old gal," he said affectionately, slapping her on the nose.

Jeff worked fast, and his hands were soon shiny with grease from the wool. He seemed to be getting a whale of a kick out of what he was doing, although I couldn't see why; work on a Southern ranch is just about the same as work anywhere else. But my father was watching Jeff's face, and it seemed that he saw something there that I wasn't old enough to see.

"Are they after you?" my father asked.

"Yes."

"Will they come up here?"

"Sure to. And damn soon."

My father went on shearing in silence for a while. Then he asked,

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as if he had carefully worked out the conscience part of it, " Do you want to hide ? "

Jeff said, " No, thanks. I'm doing just what I want to do right now."

" Is your arm all right ? " My father was looking at the red stains on Jeff's sleeve.

" Yeah. It got grazed last night ; started bleeding again when I changed my clothes. It's all right now." He looked at me. " This your boy ? "

My father smiled. " Yes, that's Jimmy. I guess he was only a couple of years old when they took—uh, when you left. Jimmy, this is Jeff. He used to work here."

Jeff put down his shears to shake my hand. I had a misty memory of hearing something about Carter Jeff—a dreamy man but a good worker, who had gone to town one night and got in a terrible mess. We shook hands and he went back to work.

He seemed to be in a hurry now with what he was doing. He and my father together sheared all the rest of the sheep in the corral—seven or eight—in less than an hour. I was busy all that time tying fleeces and throwing them up into the mouth of the big woolsack that hung from a hoop on the wall.

When they were done my father said, " Well, that was the last batch." Then he picked me right up off my feet—something I hoped he wouldn't be able to do next year—and dropped me into the woolsack too. " Jump up and down and tromp it good," he said.

I did, and he lifted me out again. I was glad we had finished, because I wanted to take a look at my new pet.

When I got there the little rabbit was still squeezed down in the far corner of his hutch, trying to hide behind a lettuce leaf. He was completely dry now, but he hadn't moved even enough to fluff out his fur. He seemed to shrink as I approached the hutch. His little ears were still pressed down against the back of his neck.

I was sorry he wasn't happy, but I was too excited to worry much about that. He was the only albino cottontail my father had ever seen or even heard of, and he was mine. Surely he would start liking me soon, and feeling grateful. I told myself that an all-white cottontail alone in the foothills would have had a hard time not getting caught by a coyote.

My father was calling me. I went back to the barn and he asked, " Is the Collins Creek water coming through all right ? "

I'd almost forgotten. " Sure," I said.

" How much ? "

" Plenty. Eighty inches at least."

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" Fine," he said, " and thanks." That was how my father was. " Thanks "—to his own son.

My father turned to Jeff. " I've got to go and start the irrigation. Make yourself at home."

I looked at Jeff and saw that he seemed to be more nervous, now that he wasn't doing anything. " Do you want to see a rare albino cottontail, Mr. Jeff ? " I asked.

He looked at me. " Why, sure, Jimmy. I think I've got time for that."

I led him over to the hutches. But the minute we got there I could see he didn't like them. He stared in at Benjamin, the rabbit, for a long time, and then he said, as if to himself, " Better off dead." That was what he said, but he didn't seem to be holding it against me personally, or even talking to me at all.

Well, some people appreciate some things and other people appreciate others. " I've got to go check my box trap," I said. " Want to come ? "

He'd been standing there almost paralyzed, looking at Benjamin. He seemed to be relieved at my suggestion, and he turned and clapped me on the shoulder, smiling again. " Let's go."

We started off for the little canyon behind the farm. As we topped the rise beyond the barn Jeff stopped and scanned the road, where it was visible for a couple of miles down in the valley. There was nothing in sight, and I was glad.

I said, " Perhaps they won't come."

" They'll come," Jeff said.

He took a big breath and threw back his shoulders, but he didn't walk on right away. From that point you could look down on the pasture and see the sheep scattered over the hillside, nuzzling at the wild oats and filaree. Freshly sheared like that, they looked trim and clean and almost like deer. Jeff looked at them for a long time, and then off over the open valley, enjoying it. Then he turned to me and asked, " Where to ? "

I led him down the back lane to the bottom of the little canyon, and then up the path towards where my box trap was. Before we got there we heard a rush of wings and looked up. Fifteen or twenty large, chunky birds were settling into the top branches of one of the blue-gum trees. Jeff stopped and stood looking up at them, smiling.

" Wild pigeons," I said. " They're round here for a while every spring. My father says they go up into the mountains and live off piñons."

" That's right," Jeff said, without looking away from them. " I remember." Then he shook his head and licked his lips. " Let's get on."

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My trap was just a few steps on up the trail, under a couple of old pear trees. It was an apple box, screened on top, and I saw that it was flat on the ground instead of being cocked up at an angle. "Probably something in there," I said. I bent down, and peered in through the screen. What I saw was disappointing. "Possum," I said. "I catch them all the time. I hoped it was a quail; they're much harder to get."

I didn't want another possum. I tipped the apple box back off him. He had tried to get out, because the screen was torn loose at one corner. When I flipped the box back, it fell over a little seedling pear tree, no bigger than a weed. I remember distinctly how the top leaf of the seedling stuck out through the torn screen, and I suppose I'll never forget it now.

The possum didn't run, but just crouched low, baring his sharp yellow teeth. A Californian possum, scrawny and not much bigger than a squirrel.

Jeff advanced and held out his hand towards the animal's head. The possum opened its jaws and began to hiss.

"Careful!" I warned. "He might bite!"

"I doubt it," Jeff said, and he was right. The possum's mouth stayed open, with the triangular teeth showing, but he stopped hissing, and even let Jeff stroke his long, sparse fur.

We heard the noise of wings again and looked up. The pigeons had all taken off, almost at the same time, and were flying in a big circle.

I glanced at Jeff, and the look on his face somehow scared me.

He was staring at the pigeons as if he were trying to memorize them—the pattern their wings made and the way the sunshine accented the black band across the tail feathers. He was still looking up when they came back and settled in the tree again, with the sun picking out purple and green lights in their neck plumage. I decided Jeff must be making a kind of collection of things to remember after he got back to prison, but something about the way he was behaving sent shivers up my back.

When we looked down by our feet again, all we saw was the scattered leaves over the screen that I always used under the trap to keep the animals from digging out. The possum was gone. "Good," Jeff said.

It was all right with me too; a possum wasn't the same thing as a rare albino rabbit. I wished Jeff had been able to see that difference, a while ago, instead of saying the rabbit would be better off dead.

We turned and started back down the path, Jeff walking fast now, as if time were precious. When we got back to the road we met my father. He had just started the irrigation in the little hilltop grove on

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the far side of the canyon, and was going back to start it in the main grove by the house.

Father seemed worried as he looked at Jeff.

"Are you getting what you want?" he asked. Then he laughed an uneasy laugh. "I mean to say, are you two having a good time together?"

"Sure," Jeff said. "Jimmy, you'd better go along with your father. I'm going to take a look at the hilltop grove."

I looked at my father. "Can I go with Mr. Jeff?"

"It's up to him."

Jeff said, "Come along, if you want."

He seemed glad of the company. We went up the road towards the little grove while my father went back towards the barn. As soon as we got up out of the canyon, Jeff's eyes went to the valley road again. Even now there was nothing but the vacant white line, losing itself in the haze of distance. I began to feel happy and relieved.

Jeff walked over to where he could look down the first row of young orange trees. "Your father and your grand-dad and me laid out this grove," he said.

His eyes noticed something down the row, and then I saw it too. The irrigation water in the Number One furrow was running into a mole hole, about thirty feet from us, and a little delta of mud in the next furrow showed where the water was coming up again. Jeff walked over to the mole hole and stepped hard, several times, between the two openings. Water and soft mud squirted out into both furrows and then the water in Number One started down its rightful course again.

"Your father is the best man and lousiest irrigator I ever knew," Jeff said.

I looked off over the valley again, just to make sure nothing was coming. And this time, away down there, probably two miles away, I saw a car. It was moving fast, leading a cloud of dust up towards our ranch.

I looked at Jeff and said, "Car coming."

His back was towards me. I saw him stiffen, but he didn't turn. He went over to the nearest orange tree and inspected an orange. At this time of year the oranges were glossy green knobs the size of small marbles. He raised one of them on his curved index finger and wiped the dust off it with his thumb. He studied it for a long time, as if he hadn't ever seen one before, finally letting go of it to pick a young leaf off the tree. He crushed the leaf, and then held his cupped hands up to his nose and breathed deep.

The car was getting closer. It seemed to me as if I could hear it, over the sound of the water splashing from the head gates. I didn't

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want that car to get here ever, but I knew it would, and soon.

Jeff had left the orange tree and was stooping over a furrow. " Come over here, Jimmy," he called. I went over, and I noticed that he was sweating. " Look down there," he said. " Bottom of that furrow is all loaded with little flakes of mica ! See how the water makes 'em shine ? Isn't that the most beautiful thing you ever saw in your life ? "

" Sure is," I said, although it really wasn't much. My little rabbit was much more beautiful, whether Jeff liked him or not.

" Listen, Jimmy. Thank your father for me. Tell him I'm very glad I came ; got just what I wanted. Thank him for me ; will you do that ? "

" Sure will," I said, although I wondered why he couldn't write my father a letter from the prison.

The car topped the rise behind the barn and I got a good look at it before it dipped down into the little canyon. It was a big black van, full of men in dark uniforms, and there were shiny gun barrels sticking out of the windows. At least one of these was a machine gun—something I'd never seen before except in magazines.

The car was out of sight in the canyon for about half a minute, and I wondered why Jeff didn't hide. He just stood there. He said, " Don't blame these men for what they're going to do, Jimmy. I'm not leaving them any choice. Be sure to remember that."

Then the car was very close to us, and Jeff was still standing there, giving them a good look at his face. Suddenly he put his open hand on my chest and pushed me hard. I flew backwards, trying to keep on my feet, and ended up flat on my back under an orange tree.

The car skidded to a halt and all its doors flew open at once. I saw Jeff turn and start to run. He didn't run fast or try to dodge, and he was careful not to break the furrows with his feet. Soon he was out of sight from where I was, but I knew he was still down that same row. I could tell by the direction all the guns were pointing.

He wasn't going to let them take him !

The guns went off in a long, crackling roar like thunder when the lightning is very near. Then there was silence. Somebody said, " Look after the boy," and a big man came over to me and raised me up by the hand.

He turned me towards the barn and said gently, " Go on home, sonny."

I took a few steps and then turned to look down the row. All I saw was the backs of three uniformed men who were walking slowly down that way, but I knew what was beyond them. " Get along," said the gentle voice behind me, and I started off down the road towards the barn.

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My first half a dozen steps were slow and dazed, but then my brain seemed to catch fire and I started to run. At the bottom of the canyon I passed my father coming the other way, not hurrying. He must have known what the shooting meant as soon as he heard it. I saw tears in his eyes.

I wasn't crying myself, and I remember wondering if anyone over eleven years old could really cry. I ran on, faster and faster, towards home, and the only things in my head now were Jeff's remark, *Better off dead*, and the sound of those guns. Better off dead. He'd said that about my white cottontail. In my imagination I could see the little rabbit dead, with blood on his white fur.

I ran past the barn and up to the cage. The baby cottontail was still inside, and still looking frightened. "Better off dead!" I shouted at him, and I opened the door, pulled him out fiercely, and started to run again.

I ran up the Collins Creek ditch, still not crying and thinking I would never cry again and holding the little rabbit in both hands out in front of me.

I almost stumbled and fell once, but I didn't slow down. I went full tilt past the piles of soggy trash where the dead snake and pheasant were.

When I got to the big sycamore tree where I'd found the little rabbit, I knelt down and put him on the ground, still between my hands. Then I gave him what Jeff had died for—just by taking my hands away.

The cottontail crouched there for a split second and then took off in an awkward leap that landed him on his side, where he kicked wildly until he got his feet under him. An instant later he was scooting off into the brush, his tiny hind end bobbing up and down like a ping-pong ball.

I lay on my back and looked up through the leaves of the sycamore at the wide blue sky, and I discovered I wasn't too old for tears.

* * *

STEPPING OUT

A woman returned a smart pair of shoes to an exclusive Bond Street shop from which she had bought them. "They won't do," she said. "I simply cannot walk in them."

"Madam" the salesman replied, looking down his nose superciliously, "clients who have to walk do not shop here."

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THE ONE NIGHT

"Leah was tender eyed; but Rachel was beautiful and well favoured . . ."

by PAMELA HILL

SHE stayed huddled in the corner of the tent listening to the voices and the laughter outside.

They had stopped singing now, and that meant that very soon they would have done feasting, and would sink, very many of them, on the ground as they were, wrapped in cloaks, into the slumber that was nearly upon them, so very nearly now, with new wine.

New wine made a man drowsy and very often he would not remember what he did . . .

She shuddered, then subdued it as she felt the padding footsteps of Zilpah about the tent, putting all to rights. Whatever happened, there must be nothing to let Zilpah see—or know—how she felt, as though by the pretence of having no feelings at all one might disguise the shame of the thing, at any rate for a little longer. But in the end it would make no odds, for they would all know soon . . .

And now, catching sight in the oil-lit darkness of Zilpah's greasy, barely concealed snigger, she felt as she would feel tomorrow when the snigger had spread. Then they would all—all the shepherds and cattlehands and her father's men and the men from beyond the mountains—be told of it and smile, as Zilpah did, behind hands.

"I can bear anything but that," she told herself.

But even while she told herself, she knew it was a lie because there was that to be borne, and much, much more; even as it always had been, because the other was fair and she was not so, but with red rimmed eyes and sparse lashes so that when she would look at a thing she blinked. Tonight, in the dark, that would not matter. But tomorrow . . .

She thrust her mind resolutely away from tomorrow and returned again to the thoughts that had been with her before, that would drown the laughter that still rose from outside, and the memory of herself veiled and bangled, weighed down with gold ornaments and rings in her ears, and the tunic bordered with silver coins that had been brought in the old days from Ur, before the fathers came to Haran. All that, serving as a disguise for the

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bride who was, after all, hardly seen, not taking part at the banquet at all but thrust as soon as might be into the tent, so that the wrappings would be enough concealment, that and the new wine, for the walk which was not like the walk of that other, the flat planting downward of the feet, a solid movement of the broad hips and heavy shoulders, without suppleness or invitation, so unlike the movements of that other, who should have been here. But he had noticed nothing.

She stared ahead of her at the lamp's flicker and tried to tell herself that it was right, that all her life the other had stolen what was hers and only in this way the thing that had happened and was to happen now, would it be righted. Thus would she, the elder, obtain the right of birth, as it had never been hers since the days when she had stolen, only once, green melons from the store that had come on camels from Tyre, and her father had found out and had beaten her till she could hardly stand, but that other had not been beaten. No—not then or at other times, although it was not the first or last time the other had stolen melons. There were a great many things that could be got round with pretty ways . . .

"It is time." Zilpah still stood there with the half smile on her face.

She was tempted to tell her angrily to mind her place, but what was the good of it? "You will take the lamp," she said wearily. Her own voice sounded strange and dull, although her heart was thudding with fright.

"And the oil, too, I had better not leave."

The amused insolence of the tone made her blush in the shadows which leapt, black and monstrous, as the woman carried the oil-dish beyond the tent.

Somewhere outside a man had started up again in a drunken song. They had not gone yet, then. For an instant's horror it came to her that it might be *he*—

No, that would not be his voice. She smiled tenderly in the darkness. It was so long since she had had to be content with small things that she had hugged them all to herself; his voice, the liquid dark of his eyes with a golden honey-drop at the back of them, and the way the hair curled softly on his long smooth neck above where the sun caught it. Oh, she remembered it all.

She drew a frightened breath. It would not be the same tonight. Tonight he would be a stranger, any person, drunk with new wine. No . . . she prayed to God that he might not see her. If that were so he would be angered too soon, and all would be in vain.

She had loathed the scheming of it.

"If I had been fair," she thought, and remembered how all

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her life these seven years had been made up of " if's." If, like the other's, her eyes had been clear dark ; if she had been gliding and swift of high arched foot, with a glance over the shoulder that had no need of words ; if it had been herself and not that other who had been guiding the sheep that day, when the very weary and travel stained boy had come down from the mountains, and had rolled the great stone away from the well for the sheep to drink, and then fallen on the other's neck and wept . . .

" It might have been I. If it had only been I."

But there had been other times—only then it had been too late. So often she had come upon him working in the pens, content with the smallest wage that the father paid, and his tunic sticking to him with the fierceness of the noonday heat, but still he worked on. He would hardly stop to drink the goat's milk that she brought him, so eager was he towards the goal for which he had worked all these years with only that miserable reward, and now—this.

" What have I done ? " she breathed, and sobbed quietly against her arm so that the sound might not carry outside.

She remembered how, as the end of the time drew near, her father had grown wary, even more so than usual, and had watched and listened while they spoke of the young man who was, after all, the father's kinsman, and how there should be better things for one who handled the lambs tenderly so that they did not die. He was unwearying in his pursuit of a lost sheep that had got strayed away up in the mountains in the frost, and husbanded his flocks so carefully that at the year's end there would be the loss of hardly one of them and the increase of many.

They spoke of him already as a leader, and that there was a blessing upon him which was not on the father's sons ; and should such a one work for so small a wage ? It was not right . . .

Someone brushed against the outside flap of the tent and she shivered. Was he here so soon ? In the half dark it did not seem possible that she should not be recognized . . .

She forced her thoughts back to the day the father had sent for her, and it had become clear that she, the unwanted ugly one, would have a part to play after all—a deceptive and shameful part. It was so much more shameful for her than for the other, who did not care and who would sit now and giggle in her own tent till all was over. In her eyes, too, the half amused smile . . .

But she, who was so ugly that even old Ben-Akim from beyond Jabesh who had bargained for her, thinking she would be cheap, had called off at last over the price of cattle and married instead a woman of Bezer, so that she, when she heard, had been glad—well, *she* had heard the father's voice, low and amused from where he sat in the shadow of the tent skins, out of the way of the heat.

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" It is a thing noticeable to me that you have cast your eyes on a young man who works in the fields, and to whom you take goat's milk daily."

She had fixed her eyes on his smiling mouth and not his eyes, which were hard. The other things he had had to say she had not heard for a while. The thing he had found out about the goat's milk had made her ashamed, for it had been a thing to keep to herself. No one else would go down in the heat of the day beyond the compound and the well, with a wooden dish and the curds in it with a palm leaf over to keep them cool. No one but she . . .

He had always thanked her with a friendly, courteous smile. That was all, but it was what she came to look for. The other would laugh, if she knew, like a cat curled up after cream.

" Goat's milk ? " she would say. " Well—"

And no more than that, but it would mean so much more. There is no harm in goat's milk ; a man was never drunk on goat's milk, and it is safe enough for you, my sister, to take milk from a whole herd if you so desire it, every day for a hundred years, for he will never look at you.

Ah ! but that was her memory, and they had destroyed it . . .

She heard the father with his shrewd bargaining voice going on. Suddenly a thing that he said wrenched her out of her thoughts and made her, for the first time, stare at him dully, not believing what she heard or even that she had heard it at all.

" It is a reproach to me that my elder daughter should go husbandless, and for that reason I will give you first to this man."

And she remembered the trembling of her whole body as she realized, then and later, the deceit that was to be put upon her to overcome his reproach. And the beginnings of a wild desire, fierce because it was suddenly within the bounds of hope, so that at first she had not minded the father's hand on her arm and his voice, whispering, placating, cajoling, in her ear.

" Not a word. Don't tell little sister. Not a word."

But little sister knew now, in the way of things. She had been bribed at last with sweetmeats and the threat of a beating and packed off into a corner of the far tent, where she would be now listening, and smiling . . .

Would I have been bribed with sweetmeats ? she thought fiercely.

No, never, never ; not if they had beaten her till she could no longer feel . . .

" That is how I love him." And soon he would come. He would come, expecting the labour of seven years' reward. Had they been hard, the seven years ? In spite of all she had seen and known, she remembered something that the other had once told her.

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" He counted the years as days for love of me."

And then a little laugh, and silence . . . did the other care ? One thought of that, suddenly, now in the tent, when it was too late.

It was not too late, a voice said to her. Slip out of the tent, now, into the light of the fire ; let the light shine upon you, and they will see, and know . . . Do it.

She could feel her heart still thudding strangely. In her mind the two emotions tore at one another, leaving her shaken and afraid.

She lay still. Into her mind came the thought that she had always known she would lie still. The darkness in the tent thickened, and there was no sound but her frightened breathing, and the loud beating of her heart.

Presently he came. She had known he was coming even before she heard the quickened footsteps at the door of the tent, and the drunken cry of goodwill to him from a shepherd on the ground outside who was even not yet asleep. She had grown so that she would know when he was near.

It is quite dark, she thought ; he will not see. Even the ashes of the fire outside have died.

" Are you there, little heart ? "

She could see him peering uncertainly in the frame that the flap made in the doorway. Presently he dropped the flap and came towards her. It was dark now, and she was only conscious of her fear and of the warm smell of the skins.

" Yes," she whispered, " I am here." Did her voice sound like the other's ?

She heard him laugh in the darkness, and the sound made her afraid. He stumbled across, knocking against unfamiliar objects, a pile of skins, a wooden chest that in the daytime had carved signs. Her heart, which before had been beating so loudly, seemed to have almost stopped from fear.

" The lamp," she heard him say. " Where is it, I—"

She half started up, terrified. " No—"

" Why not ? " He sounded to her suddenly shy and awkward. Her own voice came, strangely unlike her own.

" Because I am ashamed."

She heard his laughter again, low and tender. He came swiftly and laid his hands on her body, slipping his arms underneath her so that she was encircled in them, and she could feel his mouth.

" Do you know I've never kissed you before ? Do you ? Not since that one day—"

Suddenly he seemed to feel the tears on her face and he passed, with curious gentleness, a hand over them. When he spoke again his voice was bewildered.

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"Crying, dear love—"

All the time through her silent crying she was conscious of the wine on his breath, very faintly, but enough to remind one of the things that had been, and would be. She lay quietly in his arms.

He was talking on rapidly, to comfort her and to cover his own awkwardness, and the things he said were like nothing she had ever heard before, so that through her misery came a kind of happiness—"He said them to *me*. No one can take that away."

The thought was to grow stronger with her, but for now there was strangely pity for him, for his young awkwardness and the long strength of his limbs against her, muscles hard from climbing in the hills. She forgot her own fear in soothing him. He might have been a child.

"I love you so. I've always loved you." It was hard to hear that.

"There," she said, "there." Her hands caressed him timidly. He lay with his mouth against her throat, talking always.

"It's like a dream," he said once. "A dream. I can't believe that you—you—are here. Ever since that day—"

Footsteps outside, stealthy and cautious; an ear raised for angry voices. Her arms tightened about him fiercely.

"Since then I haven't known you. I've hardly exchanged a word with you since then, and never alone. I didn't know what you felt, if—if you felt as I did, or if you only assented to . . . a bargain . . . Tell me, in God's name, that it isn't that. Let me hear you tell me . . ."

"No," she said. "No. It isn't that." The footsteps had gone.

"You love me, then?" he said joyfully. "It was as we found it that day at the well? Do you remember?"

"I love you. I've always loved you. Right from the first day."

She felt his arms' sudden strength. She would not think of the well. This was hers, and that other—

Soon it became easy not to think of the other, the memory only remaining as a dimness of the mind. It had seemed in the end, on an instant, as though her body were translated and made of fire, and the murmuring of his voice had stopped and there was a silence between them that held all things.

Only presently he said, "You love me? *You* love *me?*" in a wondering voice, like a child again, and it was in the same instant that she discovered he was to her as her child that she found that ecstasy and pain are the same, and apart from happiness. In the one moment of her burning, yielded, painful body's fulfilment she felt the strength of his arms one with her strength, and his child's weakness in her weakness. "We are one," he said presently. He was sobbing.

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" Don't cry," she said gently. " Please don't cry."

" Oh, but I've hurt you—"

" No." But she knew it was not for that he cried.

" I never knew," he said once, " that it would be like this. Even you ; I've never, you know, never looked at anyone, spoken—"

" No." Seven years in the fields, one ideal only present before the mind always, one dream. Her hands caressed his head. Slowly, her fierce triumph grew.

" Nothing can take tonight away—nothing, nothing." She said the words over to herself in her mind, and for the knowledge she had that the whole of life was in this moment her mouth and arms welcomed him, and she could hear the rapid low voice going on again now, in the speech that was different from the rough speech of the hill men, so that at first she did not listen to the words, only lying gladly in his arms. But soon the words became clear.

" I thought that nothing would be for me after a thing I did which I can tell to no one but you, and I did not think that I would tell even you, who are my wife, but now . . . And if I tell you you may no longer love me. I stole, you see—once, twice. I stole."

Her arm pressed his face closer between her breast and shoulder. " Do you forgive that ? " he murmured. " Do you ? "

" Yes. Yes."

" Ah ! to hear that . . ."

Presently he went on again. " You know where I came from, because they will have told you, but I didn't tell them everything. No, not that . . . Here, you see, I've been in the fields and minding the cattle, and it might not seem to you that I was a tent man, but, dear God, I was so, even reading and writing on parchment scrolls."

He laughed, a little weary sound. " The other one—my brother—wasn't like me, but then I'm not like anyone. I stole something of his—two things ; I can't explain."

" I know," she said. And then, " Go on."

" I was afraid," he muttered, " and yet—no, not that. But the smell of the blood of animals he'd killed, and he—and he'd married two Hittite women, and for a long time I couldn't bear the sight of a woman, except my mother. And my father loved him best, always. My father was blind."

" Did your mother love him best ? " she said.

" How did you *know* that ? Why, you, you—"

Suddenly he relaxed against her and went on talking gently, as if it had been his mother he talked to, while she smoothed his hair. " I left," he said. " I had to leave. He would have killed me."

He had left his mother and father and the hairy brother hot

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from the chase and wandered on foot over the mountains until he, who was a tent man, had found his feet blistered and sore. " Oh, I can laugh now "—his mouth was against her—" but then it was as bad as anything I'd ever known, there's never been anything as bad as that time. The mountains were bare and I'd eaten all the food I had with me days before; it was bare and rocky, and the sun beat down during the day, although at night it was cold, and I thought I'd die . . ."

He laughed again, shakily. " *Now* I'd think it was nothing. Often I've climbed further in one day for your father than in three there . . . but that was before the thing happened."

" What thing ? " He had rolled over on his side in the darkness and she could see the dim outline of his head and imagine his eyes, very bright, gazing up at her, and she felt panic rise and drew his head, gently, with her free arm towards her breast again. " What thing ? " she said.

" Oh, oh . . . the most wonderful thing. I'd never expected to tell you this part, even you. I knew I loved you, but—but *that* was different; I—I can't explain," he said again lamely. " But tonight you're—different, and I can tell you. You're as you were the day at the well. The day I first saw you and knew that I could roll away the stone, and that I'd love you always, always, coming after *that*—"

He drew her to him again and kissed her gratefully and gently many times. He kissed her eyes—her eyes, if he could see them !—and then holding her still, talked on, in an exultant, fierce voice now, although still so low that no one outside the tent could hear it; and it was for her, her, to listen and hear . . .

" You're my wife, my love, my darling. We'll never be like other people, men and wives. Dull and—and *separate*, not one knowing the other's mind. But you're me, and I'm you, body and soul—there must be nothing, nothing, that's hidden one from the other, now or ever."

" I stole too, once," she said softly. " Green melons."

He began to laugh joyously, as though it would no longer serve to bottle up his laughter. He laughed against her and kissed her, not in the way of a moment ago, but daftly, as if they were together in some wild conspiracy. " You, too ? " he said. " You, too ? "

Then he stopped laughing, and after a moment's silence she heard his voice again, oddly solemn and hushed, although the words were still clear to her, and their meaning clear.

" This thing that happened was like no other thing that's ever been, and at the time it made me afraid. I was quite alone, you see, and it was in a high place, a rocky place. There was no one there, and yet—and yet I felt that there was someone.

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"I can't explain the feeling. To this day it has me held in a kind of terror, when I think of it—and yet gladness, gladness, because of what came after. But I'd been tired, as I said. There was nothing in my pack left but lamp-oil, and I couldn't eat that. And I couldn't go any farther, and the sun had set and it was dark. I lay down and tried to sleep, and the ground was hard, and I took a stone and slept with that under my head, and that was easier. I couldn't have helped sleeping, I was so tired. It seemed to me that I wouldn't wake, but would die there, and it was cold.

"The stars were out and the sky was shining with them. I don't know if you look at the stars. I do—at night, often, among the sheep, but it wasn't like *this* night. I suppose I must have been asleep already, but it seemed to me that I was awake. And it seemed to me that the stars were near the earth in a queer way, and that they were moving stars."

His voice took on a note of awe and wonder. "And then, my God! it *wasn't* stars, but angels, God's messengers, going up and down. I could see them so clearly. I can't describe—"

He talked on, in the strange rapt voice. She lay very still, listening. To her mind came a queer acceptance of the fact of this moment, its significance that would remain with her all her life, whatever else should come.

I am no longer myself, she thought. I am no longer anyone.

Strangely, she was glad. At that time all guilt had left her, all passion and remembrance, everything except the sense of what she was hearing now, so that it seemed her mind soared with his to the stars and beyond, so that whatever should come later would be only of lesser things.

And presently he would turn to her again with love and take her for the person she was not, and it would be as it had been again between them, only with a difference now that she had something he had never meant to give her, the other, or anyone.

His voice already was coming down off the heights of loneliness. She could hear its laughing declivity with what was almost a stab at the heart, although not for the reason that it would have been, any time these seven years.

"And then I met *you*—" He moved agreeably. It was the comfortable trusting movement of someone who awakes after long sleep, as though he had told her of that, not waking, but sleeping.

"Please, please, again," he whispered, and he took her confidently now, secure in the promise of his newly won manhood and also that other promise which had decreed that his seed should be blessed in all the earth. She saw him now as a new person, not to be less loved because of what he had told her.

For tonight he had loved her. "He loved me, me."

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She held him through the hours when, sometimes, he slept, knowing that never would she hold him quite this way again. There were things she would remember. Once when he had half wakened, he reached out as if to make sure she were really there.

"You're kind," he said, wondering. "Why were you never kind before?"

She thought of that, as the dawn grew nearer. Already in the tent it was beginning to be light, and when he wakened this time he would see her face, with the red eyes. But for now she held him. She looked down at his face, now that she could see it, knowing and memorizing every feature and line for days to come.

She had not slept, but she felt no weariness, and the acceptance of what was to be was already obscuring what had been, so that she would be able to face it. Very soon now he would wake, and she would see the look in his eyes as he beheld her, and hear the sounds that his voice would hold as he rushed in his undress to the larger tent. She could feel pity for the sniggering that he must endure, and a feeling for herself in the foreknowledge that through all their life he would never forgive her, that the rest of the years would be spent in humiliation and defeat, that far more than the other thing that had been between them there would be lack of forgiveness for this, the wresting from him of his most precious secret when he was unaware.

He would never forgive her. But the feeling that she had for herself was still not pity. In her mind ran the words of the promise, dimly heard as yet and not, as they were to be later, strong as a river in pride.

There would be time, later, for all that. Only now, in the last hour that remained to her, as the light grew, she watched his face, feeling his calm breathing against her; and knowing, by the stir now and again of his lashes, that soon he would wake.

* * *

TOUCH AND GO

H. G. Wells once founded a publication with his friend Henley, but unfortunately it was not very popular. One day the friends stood in their office window and watched a funeral procession go by. Remarked Wells in a worried tone, "I hope that is not our subscriber."

From the Belgian "Face à Main"

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I COULD DIE LAUGHING

It was every man's dream—a derelict vessel with riches beyond imagination

by FRANK STUART

"OLAFFSEN is getting a new ship!"

That was what they were saying with ribaldry and blasphemy, beating each other's backs in every dirty dive along the New Orleans waterfront, one blustery sunny morning just after the turn of the century. Out of holes in the dank and crumbling walls came creeping the human rats who lived by insuring seamen's lives away. If Captain Harry Olaffsen's new ship was the one rumour named, there would be business to be done. Dirty business.

The man himself was standing in a doctor's office overlooking the shipping down in the harbour. Fourteen stone of him, big, burly, smart—and very hard.

"That's my death sentence, then!" he said abruptly.

"It is!" agreed the doctor who had just been examining him. The doctor was small, precise, and no less hard than his patient. "You've been drinking already this morning, and no doubt when you get out of here you'll drink some more. You're in a killing temper, and you won't curb it. If you won't ease up, three months is the very most you'll last."

"I don't need that long!"

"I'm wasting my breath to tell you—but if you stopped spirits, tobacco, over excitement and over exertion, you might go on for years."

Olaffsen laughed.

Five minutes later, the big man strode into the offices of *Lettemgo and Chansit*, ship owners. Clerks leaped from their stools, but Olaffsen shoved them aside, grinning, banged back a door marked PRIVATE, and entered old Lettemgo's office. The door thumped to and clicked. The skipper seemed to overfill the shabby, dirty room so that the paper-strewn desk now appeared to have backed against the far wall crushing old Lettemgo behind it. As you might squeeze a little garter-snake before it turned on you.

"You'll take a drink, Captain," the old man said, and poured out three quarters of a tumblerful of undiluted whisky. "Sit down, man!" He pushed across a box of cigars, and looked at Olaffsen

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out of red rimmed eyes, one of which leered. The eyelid of the other drooped permanently as if to hide his thoughts. "You've come to accept my offer?"

"I'll do it for five thousand."

"I offered you three. You're joking, Captain."

But neither of them laughed. "If you pull that gun, I'll tear your head off, you craven minded ship chandler," Olaffsen remarked. He began to grin. "What's the idea—why murder *me*? I suppose you want your job done cheaper with no witnesses?"

Old Lettemgo never moved. "It would be self defence, Captain," he said softly, staring out of his red eyes. "They'd find a gun in your hand with one chamber fired and a bullet in the wall behind my back."

"I don't carry a gun."

"We'd find you one."

Olaffsen, still ready to spring, spread out two mahogany paws, and in the gesture was something terrible. "I wonder how you'd look without a head, Mister? I'd pull it off as if you were a chicken. You know, don't you?"

"I know," agreed old Lettemgo quietly. "But you and I won't quarrel, Captain . . . Have another drink."

He refilled the glass, leering at it with an incredible pleasure, as though he knew it was killing the man opposite and that means was as good as any other. Olaffsen let the liquor slide down his throat without moving a muscle, but his eyes still watched the little ship-owner's arms for the first tremor of the hands hidden under the desk.

"You want me to sink your ship so you can make half a million out of her insurance, you flat bottomed over engined son of a bitch!" Olaffsen said, enjoying his words. "There's not much I've never done, but I've never lost a ship—much less put one down for her insurance. But I'll do it for five thousand. And I'll have the money—*now!*"

The shout banged in the airless office with the dust sealed windows. Old Lettemgo's lips split over teeth in which black and gold competed. "You're asking the extra for loss of reputation, Captain?"

There was a silence for a moment after that taunt while Death made a shadowy third. Neither man dared move. Then Olaffsen remembered the doctor, and laughed deep in his barrel chest.

"So you'll pay, will you? And you'd better!"

Old Lettemgo said nothing; he just looked, and the eyelid that drooped came down almost winking. "I'll get the money out of the desk," he murmured, to explain why he moved his hands. Olaffsen watched them for gunplay. The old man opened his desk,

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got out a cigar-box, opened it and pushed it across. It was full of dirty notes.

"You had five thousand all ready then, you devil!" the sailor said admiringly. "You knew I'd ask more, and just what I'd put it up to? Now—suppose I'd asked six?"

Old Lettemgo smiled mirthlessly. Olaffsen guffawed, stuffing the money into an inside pocket of his uniform jacket and giving his swelling chest a smack to disperse the bulge the paper made. He tilted his cap.

"Have another drink, Captain!"

The sailor's grin came off with a snap. "Thanks—no."

For the first time, his employer's face shadowed. "What's on your mind?" he asked, and watched for the reply.

Olaffsen shrugged. "More business." He heaved to his feet, the chair creaking with relief, nodded and walked out, leaving a wake of disordered clerks, and behind him in the little room a red eyed old man biting his lips and staring and staring with one eye almost shut.

The waterside rats watched the big man pass. He was never more dangerous than when a little drunk. He walked steadily; but he could do that when he couldn't see where he was going. A shabby swaggerer here and there gave him "good day," and he answered with a nod. The gulls were squealing down by the water in the sun. When he shouldered his way into a dirty insurance office, a couple of loafers near the door exchanged looks. "Wa-al," one drawled. "Now what?"

Once more, Olaffsen shoved through barriers till he got into a private room. He had always done it. It was one of the reasons why the best seaman in New Orleans had never commanded a good ship.

"Look here!" began the owner of the private office truculently, half rising—but Olaffsen's palm shoved him back with a bang into his seat. He was a lanky fellow with locks of greased hair falling all over his forehead.

"I've got five thousand in my pocket and I want another life insurance," the seaman said. "Cut the cackle. You know I can't keep money unless I do it this way, Schontz."

The insurance man stared at him cunningly. "So-ho, Captain," he muttered. "I thought you were after a gamble on the new boat. But it's your life again, is it? Sure you'll be able to keep up the payments?"

"Ever known me fail?" Olaffsen gave him a murderous look.

"Oh, no, no, no, Captain! Sure not. But you've never gone this big before. That's a lot of money—five thousand." The man's

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eyes shifted rapidly round the flyblown walls and flickered over his visitor. "You'll have a drop of something, Cap." He reached behind him for whisky.

"One glass," Olaffsen said. "Damnation to temperance!" He banged the glass down. Then he pulled out the notes from his pocket, all rolled and crumpled, and thrust them on the desk.

An hour later, he was walking, steady as a rock, into his own pleasant white house in a growing suburb of New Orleans. His wife came tearing out from a back room. "Honey—darling!" he said, and picked her up off her feet. "I've got a new ship. The *Saxon*. She's a beauty."

"Ohh—Harry!" she breathed, her cheek against his. "You're wonderful! Harry—I don't deserve it all!"

Carrying her into the neat sitting room, Harry Olaffsen felt the sudden stab, as if a knife had been thrust through his heart. He stopped, holding her, his face above her nestling head set like a rock. "Harry?" she asked, but he did not hear. His face was burned too dark to change colour, but sweat appeared slowly, bursting in great tears on his forehead and round his ashy lips. He swayed a little. "Harry!" she said sharply, trying to wriggle round to see him. But with a giant effort, as the spasm passed, he took a blind step forward, stopped rigid, then went lightly on again and sat with her across his lap. "It's hot, Honey," he said quite evenly. "I'm getting old. I feel it."

In that moment of heart disease and deathly pain his life had passed before him as they say it does before a drowning man. First memories of his father, a drunken seaman out of work coming south from New York soon after 1860 among the carpet baggers and others as tough as he. Little Harry Olaffsen—the bastard; other boys soon found *that* out. Later it was six foot young Harry Olaffsen, terror of the waterfront, idol of the girls. Third Mate Harry Olaffsen in that terrific fight with the police when they mounted cannons in Canal Street—the mêlée with men going down under the iron paling he was swinging, the flames and the yells, the race home. The news that his father was drowned at sea. Marrying Honey Monro, and swearing till it tore his guts to settle down, to keep his tongue between his teeth, to stop drinking. This dear white house—and the baby son born dead. Drink to forget.

Big Harry Olaffsen, too independent, too outspoken, too tough altogether ever to get a good command, slipping down and down, taking worse ships and worse, till he had to go to *Lettemgo and Chansit*'s coffin ships. And all the time, by heaven knew what endeavours, keeping up appearances to Honey, being the successful and respected Captain to Honey, finding plenty of money for Honey. And now—only a few weeks to go before bringing the game to a

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triumphant end—the Skipper dies a hero's death on his bridge as his ship goes down, Honey set up with cash for her lifetime from the insurances, and, of course, the darkness under the waves where seamen's bodies roll to and fro, a lonely darkness with no Honey ever any more . . .

Lettemgo and Chansit took no risks. They loaded the *Saxon* with iron because iron sinks. Broken castings, old chain cable, old rails, old fire-bars. Olaffsen thought sourly that the fire-bars, at least, might come in useful if anyone died on the voyage—one bar tied to each leg before the corpse was sewn up in canvas and flung overside. The Bills of Lading said " *Locomotives, rolling stock, iron bridges and machine parts,*" a costly cargo. But iron sinks, so the insurers would never be able to check anything afterwards—whatever they might think.

The old *Saxon* herself was heavily over insured. How *Lettemgo*'s did it all, only their father the Devil could tell. The Bills of Lading said she was bound for Eusenada with a cargo for South American railway contractors who most certainly did not know *Lettemgo*'s reputation. It made Olaffsen grin, and when Old Lettemgo came softly aboard just before sailing, the skipper laughed in his face.

" How the hell do you do it ? " he asked, as they drank in the saloon below decks. " She leaks like a basket even in harbour here. If we meet bad weather one day out, she'll sink like a stone."

Old Lettemgo stared out of his wicked eyes. " Bad weather is an Act of God, Captain—we can't count on His help," he said, allowing some whisky to trickle down his wrinkled throat. He coughed as if the blasphemy had choked him. " You've been paid to cast her away on the South American coast. Make a clean job of it if you want another ship."

There was no menace in the tone, but the red eyes seemed to turn the stuffy saloon cold.

A little later, on the high seas, Olaffsen thought of those words again. He watched his barometer falling, falling. But no Act of God was going to sink his ship. He had engaged to put her down in a certain longitude and latitude, and if it blew the breeches off hell's backside, that was where she should lie.

The ship was alone in a desert of water. There was a sweltering heat without any blink of sun—a choking heat. A vast swell ran about the sea's surface, leaving shadows in enormous hollows. The ship thumped her way onwards. Somewhere forward, men were quarrelling hysterically in the heat. The smoke from her funnel sank on the ship like a funeral pall. The vessel staggered and checked as if terrified. The sky was as gloomy as the sea, and down

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near the eastern horizon a ghastly patch of purple looked like a great bruise. It was sullenly spreading.

On the bridge, Olaffsen looked meditatively down at his sea-boots. Yesterday, without warning, his heart had hurt him so much that he had fainted on the bridge. The First Mate found him. He had been unconscious a long time, but whisky had brought him round all right.

The ship plunged her nose into a swell and shipped water which walloped over the fo'c'sle head into the well-deck. There, it surged dismally back and forth as she rolled; and before the scuppers and clanging washport doors could clear it, down went her snout again and shovelled up another deluge. The more she took into the well-deck as she dipped her nose again and again, the more she went down by the head to each succeeding roller. Shuddering, she toiled along, flinging off water in great sheets.

Already, the hogging and wracking she was enduring threatened to break the rotten ship's back and tear her seams open; yet the hurricane had not yet come, and this was only the prelude. The frightful swell, the panting heat, the airlessness, had been getting steadily worse for two days. Olaffsen had watched the panelling in his cabin opening and shutting its joints enough to put a finger in, as the vessel strained. If panelling did that, what were the seams doing? Obstinately he would not put her head-on to the swell to ease her. He had to get to South America, and his heart was not giving him one spare hour to go off course.

The grey sky began to darken as though night was falling untimely across that heaving waste. Darker—darker . . . Then a barrage of raindrops whacking like bullets. Olaffsen heard the Mate pelting up the bridge-ladder just as a huge ball of darkness hit the sea ahead, rolled towards them and struck her with a wall of water fleeing in front of it.

The ship shuddered and stalled, and from stem to stern came a cry out of her timbers. As the deluge roared over his head, Olaffsen, despite his charts and knowledge, believed she had struck a rock. The wheelhouse and chartroom windows blew in with noises like cannons. Clinging choking to a staunchion, Olaffsen believed himself lifted into the air and whirled away. He was deafened and submerged under a wave. His thoughts were blown away, but something was kicking and clutching at him, and he found it was the Mate on hands and knees, blind, overset and terrified with water and noise.

The rush of water passed, and they found they were in the ruins of the wheelhouse, the sky screeched, the ship sodden with water was ploughing deep through a flattened sea, sheeted rain was falling,

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and astern the black ball of the hurricane was rolling rapidly away.

Olaffsen gave orders instinctively. Under the physical weight of wind and rain such as he had never known, his mind jumped queer gaps. The Chief Engineer was speaking through the tube. Some nuts on the main bearing bolts had worked slack and almost stripped their threads. The crankshaft was lifting at every revolution; the awful noise of it rose even above the screaming of the storm. The Chief's voice, thin through the tube, spoke of grave risk that the piston would drive clean through the cylinder cover.

Olaffsen, almost thrashed unconscious, kept getting reports. The engine room trouble was temporarily dealt with by the use of big wooden wedges. The Chief had no sooner reported this than his high, angry voice was back again—he had found the piston-head nut slacked, so the huge half ton cover must come off somehow. Or else . . .

Grimly, the skipper ordered every man who could be spared down to the engine room. In such crises, men do blindly what they are told; thinking stops. The engine room was terrifying now, and the ship so sluggish that seamen were afraid to go down—yet they obeyed. Work began. Olaffsen heard through the tube that the engine room grating was so rotten with rust that men could not be risked on it. He told the Chief to get planks across it. Then the thinned and rusted bolts holding the grating in place threatened to give way. *Lettemgo*'s had sent out a coffin ship all right! But presently the Chief reported that the cylinder cover was off and the nut was being tightened.

With the passing of the huge black globe of cloud and wind, the force of the hurricane had slightly eased. Olaffsen felt his ship's movements thick, dangerous and feeble under his feet. The pumps were clacking madly but she had shipped so much water now that any sudden return of the hurricane with its wall of water would finish her. Could the engine room repairs be finished in time? These storms almost always returned.

The Mate was beside him again, his face lugubrious under its sou'wester. The tank tops in the engine room and boiler room, rotten with old rust, had burst in under the weight of that deluge of water. Tons of it had poured down into the engine room.

The bilge pumps could not deal with it, the bilges were full, and the water, smashing to and fro as the ship rolled, spouted up again, hit the boilers and turned into vast clouds of scalding and killing steam. At one moment, there had been an ugly rush to desert the engine room. But—the Mate's wet face became for a moment less miserable—the Chief had stopped that with a monkey-

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wrench. Olaffsen nodded. Several men were burned by the steam, one badly.

While the work raced on, in the belly of the waterlogged and perilous vessel, the hurricane tramped and stormed hundreds of miles about the frightened sea. The sky remained frightfully dark. The swell did not subside; it seemed to await hungrily the return of the wind.

Olaffsen left the bridge and went to lie down. He had to—he was worried about his heart.

While he was stretched on his bunk with everything except oilskins and seaboots on, the Second Mate knocked, entered and said, "There's a big ship on the port bow, sir. I think she's abandoned."

Olaffsen leaped into his boots and went up the ladders as if the devil were at his heels. In every sailor's mind there is always this dream of salvaging a derelict vessel and winning riches beyond imagination. His glasses trembled as he levelled them.

A ship lay deep in the water, sluggishly heaving, her bow cocked up. Olaffsen yelled a Stentor's hail through the rain pelted evening under the torn and ragged sky. She gave back no sound or sign. With thumping heart, the captain ordered a change of course. The *Saxon* toiled nearer and nearer. The other ship rolled and yawed.

Derelict! The Mate and the Second Engineer, at his elbow, muttered to each other in awed tones.

Olaffsen stared round the drenched deck. Of his four boats, the fist of the hurricane had smashed three. Suddenly, in a hoarse voice, he called for volunteers to attempt the intensely dangerous task of boarding the derelict. The Mate and Second Engineer, who had been waiting for this, jumped forward, with two A.B.'s and two firemen. Olaffsen nodded, and watched them climb into the boat, taking a light line that a sailor on the *Saxon* stood ready to pay out.

Waiting and watching for his moment till everyone's nerves were cracking, Olaffsen barked, "Lower away!"

Smartly as on a warship, the boat dropped to the crest of a leaping roller—split-second timed, or it would have been stove in like a matchbox. It began crawling away through the thickening darkness of the night. Standing first on one end, then on the other, it sidled up and down the huge troughs of the sea. Twice Olaffsen thought they had capsized.

The ship proved to be the *A.S. Johnston* of New Orleans. She was a big vessel, and plainly she had been hastily abandoned. Her boat-falls were dangling. The two A.B.'s monkeyed up them and dropped a Jacob's ladder for the rest. The boarders immediately

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got busy making fast their line ready to haul over towropes from the *Saxon*.

All the time, everyone was looking over his shoulder for the black ball of the hurricane to roll down on them again; if it came too soon, the men on the *Johnston* must inevitably drown.

Olaffsen waited, biting his lips till they bled. The two big hulks rolled and heaved, parted by less than fifty yards of swelling water. The Mate presently yelled a report through a megaphone. The *Johnston* had lost her propeller, probably when the hurricane hit her, and apparently at the same time she had shipped a tremendous sea which had punched in her hatches, filled one hold and burst a bulkhead wall. She had at once settled by the stern so dangerously that her Master must have decided that she could not possibly survive in that sea. Almost certainly, they had accepted the offer of a passing South American mailboat to take them off, for mailboats may stop only to save life and not to tow.

The Mate, an old hand and a pessimist, bellowed through the darkness that there was a fortune in her in salvage . . . *IF* she could be towed into port!

Olaffsen went down to his cabin and sat with his head between his hands, thinking it out. Something about the derelict worried him. The Mate's guesses were plausible. The *Johnston* had only stayed afloat by some freakish miracle of the shifting hurricane. She had no means of controlled movement except in tow; no one could tell exactly what damage had been done, and she might begin to settle at any moment.

It was a frightful risk to take such a vessel in tow, and a thousand times more perilous if the hurricane returned. *But why had she been abandoned so soon?*

If the mailboat was the first ship to reach them, the *Johnston's* skipper would have had to face a nasty decision. The mails would not wait. There was virtually no hope of saving a ship whose propeller had gone. Even so, Olaffsen thought contemptuously, someone had been anxious to save his skin.

The *Saxon* rolled and rolled. Olaffsen's seaboots, which he had kicked off to warm his soaking feet, slithered across the cabin at him and ran humorously away. The table under his elbows slanted this way and that. His mouth twisted. He had agreed to sink the *Saxon* and had got his money in advance. But now, supposing he could tow the *Johnston* back to New Orleans, the Salvage Court might award him for his share perhaps twenty thousand dollars. As owner of the salvor, Lettemgo might get a fortune out of the main reward, damn him. Olaffsen did not know much about the Salvage Laws, but he knew he ought to get a huge

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slice for himself. For Honey. Then, since he had to die soon, he could still put the *Saxon* away afterwards, fulfilling his promise to *Lettemgo*, when his life insurances, including the new one with the five thousand dollar premium, could add their quota. Honey would be a rich woman.

In the sloping, sliding cabin, Olaffsen sighed.

Lettemgo would make much more out of it than the rest of them put together. That thought stuck in Olaffsen's throat. Yet he was a seaman to his bones. No seaman could ever let a derelict go. Even in death, the ruling passion is strong. So his suicide must be postponed for a time.

IF he could get her home!

The decision reached, he went on deck again and began to give grim, yelled orders. Work aboard the derelict went relentlessly on through the night. Towing hawsers were made fast. Steam was raised on her donkey-boiler, and the pump steadily coughed the water out of her. The hatches were checked over and hatch-cover wedges tightened. The swamped hold was covered with improvised hatches and tarpaulins. The Second Engineer reported that though her propeller was gone, the stern gland had remained tight, they had patched up the smashed bulkhead, and there seemed now to be no fatal leakage.

Everyone had really known from the first sighting that the *Johnston* would be towed home. They all had that faith in Skipper Olaffsen. Some were dumb with excitement. Others babbled all the night about the money they would all share and how they would spend it.

The hurricane worked round and hit them again in that deeper blackness just before the dawn. With a shrieking wail that fiendish power struck the ships and the wall of water buried them, the towing-hawsers almost dragged the bollards out of the fo'c'sle head, choking men curled arms and legs round anything within reach, and thought ceased in an agony of racked and suffocating endurance and pain.

The first shock passed, the sea boiled in grey volcanoes that ran, there was a continuous dreadful thrumming in the air and the ships groaned in all their bones, but Olaffsen danced like a maniac when he saw the *Johnston* still there, plunging after him like a terrified elephant. She ploughed and rolled, but the *Saxon* plugged along, tail down, and every succeeding instant Olaffsen listened to hear her scrap-heap engines collapse. Hours passed. He abandoned all sleep and rest and haunted the broken wheelhouse like a great troll.

The seamen laboured, swore, even wept. He would not let them sleep, he hardly let them eat. They worshipped and hated him as he fought that storm for them all. The powers of Heaven

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and hell tore at them, smashed down from above and up from below, flung the puny ships like toys, drowned them with belching waves, splintered and whipped everything off them except the straining hawsers and the puny humans who clung to life with teeth and broken nails till they ached and sobbed and wished that they were dead.

The return of the hurricane, dreadful and prolonged though it was, did not have the fearful impact of its first attack. It had blown some of its strength away. The vast swell rolled and raced across the white spumed sea, the sky pressed down on their heads, the lashing rain stung the sweat off their faces and beat shut their starting eyes, the ships gambolled like whales.

But Olaffsen, pitiless, grudging words, anticipated each new freak of the storm till officers and men blasphemed in delight at seeing their puny wills and muscles able to defy all the majesty of the unleashed ocean and the sky.

All this time, Olaffsen was waiting for his heart to stab him once more. He believed he knew that next time would be the last because he could not bear any more pain than he had last endured. His face was set like stone, and though his mind twisted like a cat, his body moved slowly and cautiously, because he intended to live and get the ships into port.

If that pain came only once more, he thought, he would stiffen and fall on the deck or on the floor of his cabin. Then they would all be lost. Or if by some miracle they got back to New Orleans without him, Old Lettemgo would swindle Honey. He had to think urgently of something else, for his heart began to thump as he pictured her thanking that stinking old hypocrite as he showed her out.

Swallowing, breathing the salted air deeply, Olaffsen went below as the hurricane eased a little, and sat down at his table. Scalding coffee was instantly served by a frightened steward who believed he was waiting on a dying man on whom they all relied for their very lives. Olaffsen, sipping the coffee and watching the panels of the cabin open and shut, deliberately thought of charts. Charts. Not Honey. Charts. Slowly, unevenly, his heart quietened down.

In a wild dawn, men who ached as if they were dying brought the two ships into New Orleans. The engines of the *Saxon*, though they now clattered deafeningly and shook the ship to her guts, were still by some profound miracle where honest makers had put them. There was morning fog as they came in; the city was still asleep and looked cold and deserted.

As the ships were tying up, Olaffsen felt that pain pass through

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his heart. He stood for a moment like a man of iron defying and holding back natural forces. Then he tottered and collapsed.

Because of his incredible natural strength, or perhaps because of his spirit, he could not die. When he came to, he was in his own bed in the white house, and Honey was sitting at his side. He was frantic, but this time Nature would not be thwarted. He could not get to his feet. Days passed.

On the morning that the Salvage Court was to announce its decision, excitement made Olaffsen feel so much better that he looked cautiously round the silent room. Honey was exhaustedly sleeping in a chair. He got out of bed very silently, and picked up his clothes and stole into another room. Dressing took a long time and his mind was very vague. Presently, he found himself walking slowly down to the ship owners' office.

The clerks there got out of his way even more scared than before as he shambled through to Old Lettemgo's sanctum. He did not know it was because his face was like a deathmask.

"*YOU!*" gasped the red eyed old man behind the desk.

"Me!" said Harry Olaffsen hoarsely as the door clicked to behind him. "*You* didn't call to see *me*. Let 'em go and Chance It, eh? But I've not slipped my cable yet, you flabby, rusted hulk of devilishness. I've still got hands, eh, Mister?"

He held them out for inspection, palms up, with that awful menacing air of threatening to grip the old man's head in them. Old Lettemgo's face grew purple.

"You —— —— ——!" he spat. He literally spat, and foam bubbled on his lips. "So you've come to laugh at me! After what you've done!"

Olaffsen's chin lifted and his parchmented face flickered into attention, but Lettemgo neither noticed nor stopped. "Hell rot your bones!" he screeched on the verge of a fit. "How did you get to know we'd bought the *Johnston* just before she sailed . . . insured her . . . how did *you* know?"

His eyes almost vanished. The foam on his mouth increased. With a terrific effort he got himself in control. "Go away!" he stammered. "I've just come from the Court. We've got to pay two thirds of the value of the *Johnston*—ship and cargo—you get twenty four thousand dollars, you ——! I'll get even with you, you drunken oaf. You ——!" He choked over the unmentionable word. "Get out! Or I'll shoot you like a dog!"

Olaffsen stood up suddenly. He towered over the little maniac at the desk, ignoring the revolver aimed at his chest. "You mean . . . that ship I salvaged . . . you'd *bought* her?" A great light broke. "Oh, my God!" he whispered, licking his lips. "*You'd* bought her! You insured her to lose her like you insured the

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Saxon—and I brought both of them back . . ."

"They've seized both ships . . . I've to pay the money into Court . . . Oh, I'll kill you!" yammered Old Lettemgo, his gun hand shaking. "They can't do anything more to me . . ."

Suddenly, Skipper Harry Olaffsen pieced together the whole blinding truth. *Lettemgo and Chansit* had paid a large price for a big old ship overdue for the scrap-heap, but with a rich cargo already aboard. They had borrowed, converted, probably stolen money to insure her and the *Saxon* to such a price that they dared not let either ship be heard of again. The *Johnston* had been damaged and deliberately abandoned according to orders, and left to sink.

Then, by one of those strange and cynical chances of the sea, both ships had returned. And now the assessors had been at them. The Bills of Lading on both were found to be deliberately falsified. The Insurance Companies were after Lettemgo. The Maritime authorities were after him. Very soon, the police would be after him. At last—*Lettemgo and Chansit* had gone too far!

And in the midst of that great light he saw a glimpse of a new, unbelievable future. No more of Lettemgo's coffin ships—no more the prospect of the lonely dark under the waves, with no Honey ever, any more. There'd be money enough for both their lifetimes—even if they lived richly almost for ever.

Olaffsen began to laugh. He guffawed and shook. He put his great paws on the desk to hold himself up. Oh, the joke of it! He had done them brown! And they had to pay him twenty four thousand dollars for doing it. The money to be paid into Court, too. They were finished. No more coffin ships. No more skippers dragged down into hell to cast them away.

"I could die laughing at you, Lettemgo"—his face became suddenly grim—"but, by God, I won't!"

* * *

CHEZ NOUS!

As the crowded bus came to a standstill a stout, middle-aged man descended the stairs carrying a small girl.

Tenderly placing his burden on the pavement, he ascended the stairs again and shortly returned carrying a tiny dog. Placing the dog beside the child, he returned upstairs and again descended bearing a second child, which he stood beside the first. Once more he ascended the stairs and again returned, carrying a third youngster.

These evolutions were eagerly observed by a passenger seated inside the bus who, as father proceeded to dismount with his third offspring, exclaimed: "Lumme, 'e must 'ave a nest up there!"

New Zealand Weekly News

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ONE HALF DREAM . . .

Thy two hands I caught them
And thou hast caught my heart

Fragment of a Tchinghiané Love Song

Methinke I heare the voyce of my beloved; lo, there commeth he hopping upon the mountaynes, and leaping over the little hylles. My beloved is like a roo or a yong hart. Beholde he standeth behynde our wall, he loketh in at the wyndowe, and pepeth thorowe the grate.

My beloved answered and sayd unto me . . . O stande up, my love, my beautifull, and come O my dove out of the caverns of the rocks, out of the holes of the wall: O let me see thy countenance and heare thy voyce, for swete is thy voyce and fayre is thy face . . .

Thou art pleasaunt, O my love, even as lovelynesse it self . . . Thy chekes are lyke a pece of a pomgranate, besydes that which lyeth hyd wuthin. There are three score quenes, foure score concubynes, and yong women without nomber. But one is my dove, my darling.

SALOMONS BALLET, *translated by Miles Coverdale*, 1539

And Lo!

Her body is silk like water,
With the curves of water,
Pure and restful as water.

To be with her in the night!
Her hair, the wings of night,
And her hands the pale stars of night.

God said: Let there be eyes,
And lo! the dew of her eyes,
The dark wine of her eyes.

The Tale of Sweet-Friend and Ali-Nur,
translated from the French of Dr. J. C. Mardrus
by E. POWYS MATHERS

The Refuge

The shelter was half done when the storm broke. The rain came in a solid white sheet, soaking them before they could crawl under the bush. They were deafened by noise. The wind and the

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rain fluttered leaves and broke branches . . . A tree fell in the forest back of them. The thunder sounded directly overhead. An animal brushed against their bush . . . The rain died for a moment and then came again, still heavy and white. Water began to leak through the bush. The air was cold.

" I'm frightened, Jay."

" Don't be."

" We're so terribly alone."

He put his arms around her. Being close seemed to shut out the noise of the storm and the cold and the wet. He held her in his arms and when she put her face to his he kissed her lips. Her mouth was cool and sweet and her hair had the clean smell of something freshly washed in soap. The bush shook in the wind and the cloud-reflected lightning lit the ground in flashes. He could feel her breasts against his chest.

" My sweet," he said.

He had the good feeling of need and desire and strength. It had been a long time . . . He had not remembered how fine it was. It was like a fire in him. He opened her shirt and cupped her breast in his hand. He could feel her tremble.

" Jay ? "

" Yes."

" Don't let me go."

He moved, holding her tight against him . . .

JONATHAN LATIMER, *Dark Memory*

Without E'r A Key

I will give my love an apple
Without any core ;
I will give my love a house
Without e'r a door ;
I will give my love a palace
Wherein she may be,
And she may unlock it
Without e'r a key.

My head is the apple
Without any core,
My mind is the house
Without e'r a door
My heart is the palace
Wherein she may be,
And she may unlock it
Without e'r a key.

Old song of the West Country

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The Object and the Shadow

On the twenty second of January in 1780, I saw her on our wedding night, and found that she had the same slender figure as before. When her bridal veil was lifted, we looked at each other and smiled. After the drinking of the customary twin cups between groom and bride, we sat down together at dinner and I secretly held her hand under the table . . . and my heart was palpitating . . .

The woman servant asked us to go to bed and left us and shut the door. I began to sit down by her side and we joked together like old friends after a long separation. I touched her breast in fun and felt that her heart was palpitating too. "Why is Yün's heart palpitating like that?" I bent down and whispered in her ear. Yün looked back at me with a smile and our souls were carried away in a mist of passion. Then we went to bed, when all too soon the dawn came . . .

And so every day we rubbed shoulders together and clung to each other like an object and its shadow, and the love between us was something that surpassed the language of words.

SHEN FU, *Six Chapters of a Floating Life, translated by* LIN YUTANG

Sweete Alison

Whan that the firste cok hath crowe, anon
Up rist this joly lovere Absolon,
And hym arraieth gay, at poynt-devys.
But first he cheweth greyn and lycorys,
To smellen sweete, er he hadde kembd his heer.
Under his tongue a trewe-love he beer,
For therby wende he to ben gracious.
He rometh to the carpenteres hous . . .
And softe he cougheth with a semysoun:
"What do ye, hony-comb, sweete Alison,
My faire bryd, my sweete cynamone?
Awaketh, lemman myn, and speketh to me! . . .
I moorne as dooth a lamb after the tete."

GEOFFREY CHAUCER, 1340-1400, *The Miller's Tale*

O Woman Fair . . .

O Woman, you are not merely the handiwork of God, but also of men; these are ever endowing you with beauty from their hearts . . . You are one half woman and one half dream . . .

SIR RABINDRANATH TAGORE, *The Gardener*

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DANGER WEARS THREE FACES

It was really most confusing

by RAY BRADBURY

IN the stone galleries the people were gathered in clusters and groups filtering up into shadows among the blue hills. A soft evening light shone over them from the stars and the luminous double moons of Mars. Beyond the marble amphi-theatre, in darknesses and distances, lay little towns and villas; pools of silver water stood motionless and canals glittered from horizon to horizon. It was an evening in summer upon the placid and temperate planet Mars.

Up and down green wine canals, boats as delicate as bronze flowers drifted. In the long and endless dwellings that curved like tranquil snakes across the hills, lovers lay idly whispering in cool night beds. The last children ran in torchlit alleys, gold spiders in their hands throwing out films of web. Here and there a late supper was prepared in tables where lava bubbled silvery and hushed. In the amphi-theatres of a hundred towns on the night side of Mars the brown Martian people with gold-coin eyes were leisurely met to fix attention upon stages where musicians made serene music flow up like blossom scent on the still air. Upon one stage a woman sang. The audience stirred.

She stopped, put her hand to her throat, nodded to the musicians, and they began again.

The musicians played and she sang, and this time the audience sighed and sat forward, a few of the men stood up in surprise, and a winter chill moved through the amphi-theatre. For it was an odd, frightening and strange song this woman sang. She tried to stop the words from coming out of her lips, but the words were these:

She walks in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes . . .

The singer clasped her hands to her mouth. She stood on the stage, bewildered.

"What words are those?" asked the musicians.

"What song is that?"

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"What language is that!"

And when they blew again upon their golden horns, the strange music came forth and passed slowly over the audience, which now talked aloud and stood up.

"What's wrong with you?" the musicians asked each other.

"What tune is that you played?"

"What tune did you play?"

The woman wept and ran from the stage. And the audience moved out of the amphi-theatre. And all around the nervous towns of Mars a similar thing had happened. A coldness had come, like white snow falling on the air.

In the black alleys, under the torches, the children sang:

—but when she came there
The cupboard was bare,
And so the poor dog had none!

"Children!" voices cried. "What was that rhyme? Where did you learn it?"

"We just thought of it, all of a sudden. It's just words we don't understand."

Doors slammed. The streets were deserted. Above the blue hills a green star rose.

All over the night side of Mars lovers awoke to listen to their loved ones who lay humming in the darkness.

"What is that tune?"

And in a thousand villas, in the middle of the night, women awoke, screaming. They had to be soothed while the tears ran down their faces. "There, there. Sleep. What's wrong? A dream?"

"Something terrible will happen in the morning."

"Nothing can happen; all is well with us."

An hysterical sobbing. "It is coming nearer and nearer and *nearer!*"

"Nothing can happen to us. What could? Sleep now. Sleep."

It was quiet in the deep morning of Mars, as quiet as a cool and black well, with stars shining in the canal waters, and, breathing in every room, the children curled with their spiders in closed hands, the lovers arm in arm, the moons gone, the torches cold, the stone amphi-theatres deserted.

The only sound, just before dawn, was a night watchman, far away down a lonely street, walking along in the darkness, humming a very strange song . . .

Whoever was knocking at the door didn't want to stop.

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Mrs. Ttt threw the door open. "Well?"

"You speak *English?*" The man standing in the doorway gazed at her in surprise.

"I speak what I speak," she said.

"It's wonderful English." The man was in uniform. There were three men with him, all smiling, all dirty.

"What do you want?" demanded Mrs. Ttt.

"You are a Martian." The man smiled. "The word is not familiar to you, certainly. It's an Earth expression." He nodded at his men. "We are from Earth. I'm Captain Williams. We've landed on Mars within the hour. And you are the first Martian we've met."

"Martian?" Her eyebrows went up.

"What I mean to say is, you live on the fourth planet from the sun. Correct?"

"Elementary," she snapped, eyeing them.

"And we—" he pressed his chubby pink hand to his chest—"we are from Earth. Right, men?"

"Right, sir!" A chorus.

"This is the planet Tyrr," she said, "if you want to use the proper name."

"Tyrr, Tyrr." The captain laughed exhaustedly. "What a fine name! But, my good woman, how is it you speak such perfect English?"

"I'm not speaking, I'm thinking," she said. "Telepathy. Good day!" And she slammed the door.

A moment later there was that dreadful man knocking again.

She whipped the door open. "What now?" she wondered.

The man was still there, trying to smile, looking bewildered. He put out his hands. "I don't think you understand—"

"What?" she snapped.

The man gazed at her in surprise. "We're from Earth!"

"I haven't time," she said. "I've a lot of cooking today and there's cleaning and sewing and all. You evidently wish to see Mr. Ttt: he's upstairs in his study."

"Yes," said the Earth Man confusedly, blinking. "By all means, let us see Mr. Ttt."

"He's busy." She slammed the door again.

This time the knock on the door was most impertinently loud.

"See here," cried the man when the door was thrust open again. He jumped in as if to surprise her. "This is no way to treat visitors."

"All over my clean floor!" she cried. "Mud! Get out. If you come in my house, wash your boots first."

The man looked in dismay at his muddy boots. "This," he

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said, " is no time for trivialities. I think," he said, " we should be celebrating." He looked at her for a long time, as if looking might make her understand.

" If you've made my crystal buns fall in the oven," she exclaimed, " I'll hit you with a piece of wood." She peered into a little oven. She came back, red and steamy faced. Her eyes were sharp yellow, her skin was soft brown, she was thin and quick as an insect. Her voice was metallic and sharp. " Wait here. I'll see if I can let you have a moment with Mr. Ttt. What was your business ? "

The man swore luridly, as if she'd hit his hand with a hammer. " Tell him we're from Earth and it's never been done before ! "

" What hasn't ? " She put her brown hand up. " Never mind. I'll be back."

The sound of her feet fluttered through the house.

Outside, the immense blue Martian sky was hot and still as a warm deep sea water. The Martian desert lay broiling like a prehistoric mud pot, waves of heat rising and shimmering. There was a small rocket ship reclining upon a hilltop near by. Large footprints came from the rocket to the door of the stone house.

Now there was a sound of quarrelling voices upstairs. The men within the door stared at one another, shifting their feet and holding on to their hip belts. A man's voice shouted upstairs. The woman's voice replied, and after fifteen minutes the Earth Men began fidgeting nervously with nothing to do.

" Cigarette ? " said one of them.

Somebody got out a packet and they lit up. They puffed slow streams of pale white smoke. They adjusted their uniforms and fixed their collars, while the voices upstairs continued to mutter and chant. The leader of the men looked at his watch.

" Twenty five minutes," he said. " I wonder what they're up to up there." He went to a window and looked out.

" Hot afternoon," said one of the men.

" Yes," someone answered mechanically. The voices had faded to a murmur and were now silent. There was not a sound in the house. All the men could hear was their own breathing.

An hour of silence passed. " I hope we didn't cause any trouble," said the captain. He went and peered into the living room.

Mrs. Ttt was there watering some flowers that grew in the centre of the room.

" I knew I had forgotten something," she said when she saw the captain. She walked out to the kitchen. " I'm sorry." She handed him a slip of paper. " Mr. Ttt is much too busy." She turned to her cooking. " Anyway, it's not Mr. Ttt you want to see ; it's Mr. Aaa. Take that paper over to the next farm, by the

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blue canal, and Mr. Aaa will advise you about whatever it is you want to know."

"We don't want to know anything," objected the captain, pouting out his thick lips. "We already *know* it."

"You have the paper, what more do you want?" she asked him straight off. And she would say no more.

"Well," said the captain, reluctant to go. He stood as if waiting for something. He looked like a child staring at a bare Christmas tree. "Well," he said again. "Come on, men."

The four men stepped out into the hot silent day.

Half an hour later, Mr. Aaa, seated in his library sipping a bit of electric fire from a metal cup, heard the voices outside in the stone causeway. He leaned over the windowsill and gazed at the uniformed men who squinted up at him.

"Are you Mr. Aaa?" they called.

"I am."

"Mr. Ttt sent us to see you," shouted the captain.

"Why did he do that?" asked Mr. Aaa.

"He was busy."

"Well, that's a shame," said Mr. Aaa sarcastically. "Does he think I have nothing else to do but entertain people he's too busy to bother with?"

"That's not the important thing, sir," shouted the captain.

"Well, it is to me. I have much reading to do. Mr. Ttt is inconsiderate. This is not the first time he has been this thoughtless of me. Stop waving your hands, sir, until I finish. And pay attention. People usually listen to me when I talk. And you'll listen courteously or I won't talk at all."

Uneasily the four men in the courtyard shifted and opened their mouths, and once again the captain, the veins in his face bulging, showed a few tears in his eyes.

"Now," lectured Mr. Aaa, "do you think it fair of Mr. Ttt to be so ill-mannered?"

The four men gazed up through the heat. The captain said, "We're from Earth."

"I think it very ungentlemanly of him," brooded Mr. Aaa.

"A rocket ship. We came in it. Over there!"

"Not the first time Ttt's been unreasonable, you know."

"All the way from Earth."

"Why, for half a mind I'd ring him up and tell him off."

"Just the four of us; myself and these three men, my crew."

"I'll ring him up; yes, that's what I'll do!"

"Earth. Rocket. Men. Trip. Space."

"Ring him and give him a good lashing!" cried Mr. Aaa. He

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vanished like a puppet from a stage. For a minute there were angry voices back and forth over some weird mechanism or other. Below, the captain and his crew glanced longingly back at their pretty rocket ship lying on the hillside, so secure and lovely and fine.

Mr. Aaa jerked up the window, wildly triumphant. "Challenged him to a duel, by the gods! A duel!"

"Mr. Aaa—" the captain started all over again, quietly.

"I'll shoot him dead! Do you hear?"

"Mr. Aaa, I'd like to *tell* you. We came twenty million miles."

Mr. Aaa regarded the captain for the first time. "Where did you say you were from?"

The captain flashed a white smile. Aside to his men he whispered, "Now we're getting somewhere!" To Mr. Aaa he called, "We travelled sixty million miles. From Earth."

Mr. Aaa yawned. "That's only fifty million miles, this time of year." He picked up a frightful looking weapon. "Well, I have to go. Just take that silly note and go over that hill into the town of Iopr and tell Mr. Iii about it. He's the man you want to see. Not Mr. Ttt, he's an idiot; I'm going to kill him. Not me, because you're not in my line of work."

"Line of work, line of work!" bleated the captain. "Do you have to be in a certain line of work to welcome Earth Men?"

"Don't be silly, everyone knows that!" Mr. Aaa rushed downstairs. "Goodbye." And down the causeway he raced.

The four travellers stood shocked. Finally the captain said, "We'll find someone yet who'll listen to us."

"Maybe we should take off and land again," said one of the men in a dreary voice. "Give them time to organize a party."

"That might be a good idea," murmured the tired captain.

The little town was full of people drifting in and out of doors, saying hello to one another, wearing golden masks and blue masks and crimson masks for variety, masks with silver lips and bronze eyebrows, masks that smiled or masks that frowned.

The four men, wet from their long walk, paused and asked a little girl where Mr. Iii's house was.

"There." The child nodded her head.

The captain, eagerly and carefully, got down on one knee, looking into her sweet young face. "Little girl, I want to talk to you."

He seated her on his knee.

"We're Earth Men," he said. "Do you believe me?"

"Yes." The little girl peeped at her wiggling toes.

"Fine." The captain pinched her arm, a little bit with joviality,

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a little bit with meanness to get her to look at him. "We built our own rocket ship. Do you believe that?"

"Yes."

"And I am the captain, and—"

"Never before in history has anybody come across space in a big rocket ship," recited the little creature, eyes shut.

"Wonderful! How did you know?"

"Oh, telepathy."

"Well, aren't you excited?" asked the captain. "Aren't you glad?"

"You'd better go and see Mr. Iii right away. Mr. Iii will like talking to you." And she ran off.

The captain squatted there looking after her with his hand out. His eyes were watery in his head. His mouth hung open. The other three men stood with their shadows under them. They spat on the stone street.

Mr. Iii answered his door. He was on his way to a lecture, but he had a minute, if they would hurry inside and tell him what they desired.

"A little attention," said the captain, red eyed and tired. "We're from Earth, we have a rocket, there are four of us, crew and captain, we're exhausted, we're hungry, we'd like a place to sleep. We'd like someone to give us the key to the city or something like that, and we'd like somebody to shake our hands and say 'Hooray' and 'Congratulations, old man!' That about sums it up."

Mr. Iii was a tall, vaporous, thin man with thick, blind, blue crystals over his yellowish eyes. He bent over his desk and brooded upon some papers.

"Well, I haven't the forms with me here, I don't think." He rummaged through the desk drawers. "Now, where did I put the forms? Oh, here we are. Now!" He handed the papers over crisply. "You'll have to sign these papers, of course."

"Do we have to go through all this rigmarole?"

Mr. Iii gave him a thick glassy look. "You say you're from Earth, don't you? Well, then, there's nothing for it but to sign."

The captain wrote his name. "Do you want my crew to sign also?"

Mr. Iii looked at the captain, looked at the three others, and burst into a shout of derision. "Them sign? Ho! How marvellous. Them, oh, *them* sign!" Tears sprang from his eyes. He slapped his knee and bent to let his laughter jerk out of his gaping mouth. He held himself up with the desk.

The four men scowled. "What's so funny?"

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"Them sign," sighed Mr. Iii, weak with hilarity. "So very funny. I'll have to tell Mr. Xxx about this." He examined the filled in form, still laughing. "Everything seems to be in order." He nodded. "Even the agreement for euthanasia if final decision on such a step is necessary." He chuckled.

"Agreement for *what?*"

"Don't talk. I have something for you. Here. Take this key."

The captain flushed. "It's a great honour."

"Not the key to the city, you fool," snapped Mr. Iii. "Just a key to the House. Go down that corridor, unlock the big door, and go inside and shut the door tight. You can spend the night there. In the morning I'll send Mr. Xxx to see you."

Dubiously the captain took the key in his hand. He stood looking at the floor. His men did not move. They seemed to be emptied of all their blood and their rocket fever.

"What is it? What's wrong?" enquired Mr. Iii. "What are you waiting for? What do you want?" He peered into the captain's face.

"I don't suppose you could even—" suggested the captain. "I mean, that is, try to, or think about . . ." He hesitated. "We've worked hard, we've come a long way, and perhaps you could just shake our hands and say, 'Well done!' do you—think?"

Mr. Iii stuck out his hand stiffly. "Congratulations!" He smiled a cold smile. "Congratulations." He turned away. "I must go now. Use that key."

Without noticing them again, as if they had melted down through the floor, Mr. Iii moved about the room packing a little manuscript case with papers. He was in the room another five minutes, but never again addressed the solemn quartet that stood with heads down, their heavy legs sagging, the light dwindling from their eyes. When Mr. Iii went out of the door he was busy looking at his fingernails.

They straggled along the corridor in the dull, silent afternoon light. They came to a large burnished silver door, and the silver key opened it. They entered, shut the door, and turned.

They were in a vast sunlit hall. Men and women sat at tables and stood in conversing groups. At the sound of the door they regarded the four uniformed men.

One Martian stepped forward, bowing. "I am Mr. Uuu," he said.

"And I am Captain Jonathan Williams, of London, on Earth," said the captain without emphasis.

Immediately the hall exploded. The rafters trembled with shouts and cries. The people, rushing forward, waved and shrieked

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happily, knocking down tables, swarming, rollicking, seizing the four Earth Men, lifting them swiftly to their shoulders. They charged about the hall six times, six times making a full and wonderful circuit of the room, jumping, bounding, singing.

The Earth Men were so stunned, they rode the toppling shoulders a full minute before they began to laugh and shout at each other:

"Hey! This is more *like* it!"

"This is the life! Boy! Yay! Yow! Whoopee!"

They winked tremendously at each other. They flung up their hands to clap the air. "Hey!"

"Hooray!" said the crowd.

They set the Earth Men on a table. The shouting died down.

The captain almost broke into tears. "Thank you. It's good, it's good."

"Tell us about yourselves," suggested Mr. Uuu.

The captain cleared his throat and began to speak.

The audience *ohed* and *ahed* as the captain talked. He introduced his crew; each made a small speech and was embarrassed by the thunderous applause.

Mr. Uuu clapped the captain's shoulder. "It's good to see another man from Earth. I am from Earth also."

"How was that again?"

"There are many of us here from Earth."

"You? From Earth?" The captain stared. "But is that possible? Did you come by rocket? Has space travel been going on for centuries?" His voice was disappointed. "What—what country are you from?"

"Tuiereol. I came by the spirit of my body, years ago."

"Tuiereol." The captain mouthed the word. "I don't know that country. What's this about spirit of body?"

"And Miss Rrr over here, she's from Earth, too, aren't you, Miss Rrr?"

Miss Rrr nodded and laughed strangely.

"And so is Mr. Www and Mr. Qqq and Mr. Vvv!"

"I'm from Jupiter," declared one man, preening himself.

"I'm from Saturn," said another, eyes glinting slyly.

"Jupiter, Saturn," murmured the captain, blinking.

It was very quiet now; the people stood around or sat at the tables which were strangely empty for banquet tables. Their yellow eyes were glowing, and there were dark shadows under their cheekbones. The captain noticed for the first time that there were no windows: the light seemed to permeate the walls. There was only one door. The captain winced. "This is confusing. Where on Earth is this Tuiereol? Is it near England?"

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"What is England?"

"You never heard of England! You say you're from Earth and yet you don't know?"

Mr. Uuu drew himself up angrily. "Earth is a place of seas and nothing but seas. There is no land. I am from Earth, you know."

"Wait a minute." The captain sat back. "You look like a Martian. Yellow eyes. Brown skin."

"Earth is a place of all jungle," said Miss Rrr proudly. "I am from Orri, on Earth, a civilization built of silver!"

Now the captain turned his head from Mr. Uuu to Mr. Www and Mr. Zzz and Mr. Nnn and Mr. Hhh and Mr. Bbb. He saw their yellow eyes waxing and waning in the light, focusing and unfocusing. He began to shiver. Finally he turned to his men and regarded them sombrely.

"Do you realize what this is?"

"What, sir?"

"This is no celebration," replied the captain tiredly. "This is no banquet. These aren't government representatives. This is no surprise party. Look at their eyes. Listen to them!"

Nobody breathed. There was only a soft white move of eyes in the close room.

"Now I understand—" the captain's voice was far away—"why everyone gave us notes and passed us on, one to the other, until we met Mr. Iii, who sent us down a corridor with a key to open a door and shut a door. And here we are . . ."

"Where are we, sir?"

The captain exhaled. "In an insane asylum."

It was night. The large hall lay quiet and dimly illumined by hidden light sources in the transparent walls. The four Earth Men sat round a wooden table, their bleak heads bent as they whispered. On the floors, men and women lay huddled. There were little stirs in the dark corners; solitary men or women were gesturing with their hands. Every half hour one of the captain's men would try the silver door and return to the table. "Nothing doing, sir. We're locked in properly."

"Do they think we're really insane, sir?"

"Quite. That's why there was no hullabaloo to welcome us. They merely tolerated what, to them, must be a constantly recurring psychotic condition." He gestured at the dark sleeping shapes all about them. "Paranoids, every single one! What a welcome they gave us! For a moment there—" a little fire rose and died in his eyes—"I thought we were getting our true reception. All the yelling and singing and speeches. Pretty nice, wasn't it—while it lasted?"

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"How long will they keep us here, sir?"

"Until we prove we're not psychotics."

"That should be easy."

"I hope so."

"You don't sound very certain, sir."

"I'm not. Look in that corner."

A man squatted alone in darkness. Out of his mouth issued a blue flame which turned into the round shape of a small naked woman. It flourished on the air softly in vapours of cobalt light, whispering and sighing.

The captain nodded at another corner. A woman stood there, changing. First she was embedded in a crystal pillar, then she melted into a golden statue, finally a staff of polished cedar, and back to a woman.

All through the midnight hall people were juggling thin violet flames, shifting, changing, for night time was the time of change and affliction.

"Magicians, sorcerers," whispered one of the Earth Men.

"No, hallucination. They pass their insanity over into us so that we see their hallucinations too. Telepathy. Auto-suggestion and telepathy."

"Is that what worries you, sir?"

"Yes. If hallucinations are catching and almost believable, it's no wonder they mistook us for psychotics. If that man can produce little blue fire women and that woman there melts into a pillar, how natural if normal Martians think we produce our rocket ship with *our* minds."

"Oh," said his men.

Around them, in the vast hall, blue flames leaped, flared, then evaporated. Little demons of red sand ran between the teeth of sleeping men. Women became oily snakes. There was a smell of reptiles and animals.

In the morning everyone stood around looking fresh, happy and normal. There were no flames or demons in the room. The captain and his men waited by the silver door, hoping it would open.

Mr. Xxx arrived after about four hours. They had a suspicion that he had waited outside the door, peering in at them for at least three hours before he stepped in, beckoned, and led them to his small office.

He was a jovial, smiling man, if one could believe the mask he wore, for upon it was painted not one smile, but three. Behind it, his voice was the voice of a not-so-smiling psychologist. "What seems to be the trouble?"

"You think we're insane, and we're not," said the captain.

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"Contrarily, I do not think *all* of you are insane." The psychologist pointed at the captain. "No. Just you, sir. The others are secondary hallucinations."

The captain slapped his knee. "So that's it! That's why Mr. Iii laughed when I suggested my men sign the papers too."

"Yes, Mr. Iii told me." The psychologist laughed out of the carved, smiling mouth. "A good joke. Where was I? Secondary hallucinations, yes. Women come to me with snakes crawling from their ears. When I cure them, the snakes vanish."

"We'll be glad to be cured. Go right ahead."

Mr. Xxx seemed surprised. "Unusual. Not many people want to be cured. The cure is drastic, you know."

"Cure away! I'm confident you'll find we're all sane."

"Let me check your papers to be sure they're in order for a cure." He checked a file. "Yes. You know, such cases as yours need special curing. The people in that hall are simpler forms. But once you've gone this far, I must point out, with primary, secondary, auditory and olfactory hallucinations, as well as tactile and visual fantasies, it is a pretty bad business. We have to resort to euthanasia."

The captain leaped up with a roar. "Look here, we've stood quite enough! Test us, tap our knees, check our hearts, exercise us, ask questions!"

"You are free to speak."

The captain raved for an hour.

"Incredible," the psychologist mused. "Most detailed dream fantasy I've ever heard."

"Damn it, we'll show you the rocket ship!" screamed the captain.

"I'd like to see it. Can you manifest it in this room?"

"Oh, certainly. It's in that file of yours, under R."

Mr. Xxx peered seriously into his file. He said "tsk" and shut the file. "Why did you tell me to look? The rocket isn't there."

"Of course not, you idiot! I was joking. Does an insane man joke?"

"You find some odd senses of humour. Now, take me out to your rocket. I wish to see it."

It was noon. The day was very hot when they reached the rocket.

"So." The psychologist walked up to the ship and tapped it. It gonged softly. "May I go inside?"

"You may."

Mr. Xxx stepped in and was gone for a long time.

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" Of all the silly, exasperating things." The captain chewed on a cigarette as he waited. " For tuppence I'd go back home and tell people not to bother with Mars. What a suspicious bunch of louts."

" I gather that a good number of their population are insane, sir. That seems to be their main reason for doubting."

" Nevertheless, this is all so damned irritating."

The psychologist emerged from the ship after half an hour of prowling, tapping, listening, smelling, tasting.

" Now do you believe ? " shouted the captain, as if he were deaf.

The psychologist shut his eyes and scratched his nose. " This is the most incredible example of sensory hallucination and hypnotic suggestion I've ever encountered. I went through your rocket, as you call it." He tapped the hull. " I hear it. Auditory fantasy." He drew a breath. " I smell it. Olfactory hallucination, induced by sensory telepathy, and keeping the hallucinations from becoming sensorially weaker, is almost impossible. Those people in the House usually concentrate on visuals or, at the most, visual and auditory fantasies combined. You have balanced the whole conglomeration. Your insanity is beautifully complete."

" My insanity." The captain was pale.

" Yes, yes, what a lovely insanity. Metal, rubber, gravitizers, food, clothing, fuel, weapons, ladders, nuts, bolts, spoons. Ten thousand separate items I checked on your vessel. Never have I seen such a complexity. There were even shadows under the bunks and under everything ! Such concentration of will. And everything, no matter how or when tested, had a smell, a solidity, a taste, a sound. Let me embrace you."

He stood back at last. " I'll write this into my greatest monograph. I'll speak of it at the Martian Academy next month. Look at you. Why, you've even changed your eye colour from yellow to blue, your skin to pink from brown. And those clothes—and your hands having five fingers instead of six ! Biological metamorphosis through psychological unbalance. And your three friends—"

He took out a little gun. " Incurable, of course. You poor wonderful man. You will be happier dead. Any last words ? "

" Stop, for God's sake ! Don't shoot ! "

" A deity fixation also, is it ? You sad creature. I shall put you out of this misery which has driven you to imagine this rocket and these three men. It will be most engrossing to watch your friends and your rocket vanish once I have killed you. I will write a neat paper on the dissolvment of neurotic images from what I perceive here today."

" I'm from Earth ! My name is Jonathan Williams, and these—"

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"Yes, I know," soothed Mr. Xxx, and fired his gun.

The captain fell. The other three men screamed.

Mr. Xxx stared at them. "You continue to exist? This is superb! Hallucinations with time and spatial persistence." He pointed the gun at them. "Well, I'll scare you into dissolving."

"No!" cried the three men.

"An auditory appeal, even with the patient dead," observed Mr. Xxx as he shot the three men.

They lay on the sand, intact, not moving.

He kicked them. Then he rapped on the ship.

"It persists. *They* persist." He fired his gun again and again at the bodies. Then he stood back. The smiling mask dropped.

Slowly the little psychologist's face changed. His jaw sagged. The gun dropped from his fingers. His eyes were dull and vacant. He put his hands up and turned in a blind circle. He fumbled at the bodies, saliva filling his mouth.

"Hallucinations," he mumbled frantically. "Taste. Sight. Smell. Sound. Feeling." He waved his hands. His eyes bulged. His mouth began to give off a faint froth.

"Go away!" he shouted at the bodies. "Go away!" he screamed at the ship. He examined his trembling hands. "Contaminated," he whispered wildly. "Carried over into me. Telepathy. Hypnosis. Now *I'm* insane. Now *I'm* contaminated. Hallucinations in all their sensory forms." He stopped and searched around with his numb hands for the gun. "Only one cure. Only one way to make them go away, vanish."

A shot rang out. Mr. Xxx fell.

The four bodies lay in the sun. Mr. Xxx lay where he fell.

The rocket reclined on the little sunny hill and didn't vanish.

When the townspeople found the rocket at sunset they wondered what it was. Nobody knew, so it was sold to a junkman and hauled off to be broken up for scrap metal.

It rained all that night. The next day was fair and warm.

* * *

FORTIFIED

A young couple struck up a friendship with an Australian woman. On the arrival of her fourth child, they sent her a playpen as a gift.

The thank-you note left them somewhat astonished: "Thank you so much for the pen," it read. "It is a perfect godsend. I sit in it every afternoon and read and the children can't get near me."

ROSAMUND LEE, in *Baby Talk*

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BLAEBERRIES

For so it has always been — ever since Eve

by NEIL M. GUNN

HE was thinning turnips when she passed along the sheep-path that ran between the fale dike at the bottom of the field and the edge of the cliffs. Thus from her waist to her uncovered head her desirability was cut like a cameo against the grey floor of the sea, though he did not lift his head to look. By the time the path had taken her out of sight, he had hoed ten yards without stopping his hoe a moment. When she had disappeared altogether he did look up—to find the thin dark veil that her passing had left on the face of the sea. When his head drooped again and he considered the last ten yards of his work, his lips tightened. The mathematical precision of it was beyond all praise.

In the next ten yards, however, his hoe stumbled once. A further twenty yards, and he found his muscles uncertain and jumpy, as though suffering from reaction after strain. By the time he came to the end of the long row, he was fumbling in and out of the green line like a beginner. He put in the next half hour doggedly, and then it was six o'clock.

Down by the cliff heads at night he sat, looking on the grey floor that rose so steeply to the horizon. A curlew passed under the stars, fluting forlornly. A peewit swung up from the earth with a swift vehemence, its silken wings and two winged cry roused in persistent protest. The long tremulous calling of the curlew belongs to the impersonal reaches between earth and star, and its forlorn wave dies out into infinite space. The peewit's cry is an insistent, passionate cry, anxious, of the earth.

In his listening to the echoes of the curlew's call, his lips tightened. Something wild, clean, unearthly, stayed in that call. For her image was like the peewit's cry in that it had the same vibrant colour to it and urgency—yet not like it at all in the way of earthly care and anxiety. Her earthliness was provoking and red lipped and untasted, like wine and honey breathed upon; yet like nothing earthly either because of that veiled light in the eyes with its understandings, its reticences, its inscrutabilities.

For an hour the logical working of his mind was beyond all

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praise. No image of her could intrude wholly. Below, the grey sea washing the feet of the rocks, washing the eternal grey feet; overhead, the curlew calling to the utmost reach of the night; off the sea, the wind cooling his face, set so stonily to horizons. His body was a cool external shiver—a cool clean sheath. That for the first hour.

In the second hour his mind stumbled once, so that she entered by a simple trick. She became a figure in desert places; she became a night wrapped figure of lost dim moorland places; loose haired, slim-swaying, like a nymph or prophetess.

The loneliness in him cried out and strove towards her loneliness; strove vehemently; but as he yet caught up with her and stretched out his hand, she turned—and lo! the dimness of mystery about her face was instantly changed to the old light, and her smile, gleaming critically from slanting eyes, stopped him more effectively than would any sword.

The trick of it went through him in a hot flush, so that all his strength was turned to water and shamefacedness . . .

His body stirred there on the cliff head and his heel ground an unconscious oath into the soft turf, while his soul cried upon the night words to which there was no more meaning than to the crying of the curlew.

From the third hour she possessed him wholly, so that curlew and peewit and sea and cliff were but the stage machinery against her playing. She gave him the mystical wine and honey, and she gave him the image of red lips like yielding ripe fruit. And he drank and filled himself, a debauchery of shadows and transparencies and treacheries, till, on a moment, his body cried urgently for substance and his mouth for crushing resistances. His eyes rose flashing—to the nothingness of the grey sea.

His head drooped between his knees, and the cool wind came from the sea, passing round him and over him and swaying gently the tall grasses—a night-expanse of heedless, passionless, immemorial things, in which his doubled-up body might easily pass for a grey boulder.

The turnips swelled to a plump girth, the year waxed mellow and luscious. He came upon her of a sudden on an evening of small rain like a mist. It was the rain that draws out and holds fragrance of flower and fruit and gives to the bloom of a cheek the petal smoothness of a rose. She was eating blaeberries.

Her lips were stained purple, her fingers were stained purple, and there were purple stains here and there on her face besides—a ripe black purple.

Tiny raindrops clung to strands of her hair, a wild diffusion of

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light and colour played on her features, and concentrated light and colour flashed in her eyes.

He stood stuck fast, with no power in him to move any way at all. The skin on his face was drawn taut and pale, and his eyes were on her like the eyes of a trapped animal.

The first sign of the breathless intensity of his living was a slight quivering at the nostrils; but by that time she had taken in the knowledge of many things.

Plainly they could not stand like that for ever. She smiles, with an exquisite diffidence, and holds out a hand, in the palm of which lies a little heap of berries. He stumbles foolishly among the blaeberry bushes, and as he comes by the hand, stretches out fingers to partake. Whereupon the incalculable impulse which no woman can command runs swiftly down her arm and jerks her hand upwards above his hand—leaving the berries poised daringly midway between his groping fist and his mouth. His mouth! His heart drums in his ears as his head stoops to the stained fingers.

But it is not for nothing that these same fingers—and lips—are stained, with the small rain, a fragrant moistening of the petals; not for nothing that instead of picking and eating single berry by single berry, she gathers a whole handful in one crushing, ecstatic mouthful.

While yet his lips are three inches from her palm and opening in expectancy, a second tremor passes along her arm, a wild, mad impulse this, excited by she knows not what of uncertainties and expectancies; yet knowing, too—even to the verge of tiptoe hysteria over man's unbearable slownesses.

And in an instant through the three inches she has smashed hand and berries full against his mouth; and there and then in the blaeberry patch and in the small rain, she is swept off her tiptoes and the unbearable agony of expectancy is crushed like the berries.

* * *

WRONG NUMBER

The club secretary hurried over when he saw a visiting golfer addressing the ball a foot or so in front of the tee.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said, "but in this club we either play from the tee or behind it. Never," he emphasized with a shudder, "in front of it."

The golfer's only move was to re-address his ball.

"I must insist," urged the secretary.

The other straightened up and looked hard at his interrupter.

"I happen," he said with dignity, "to be playing my second shot."

From *The Tatler and Bystander*

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FIRST LOVE

GREEN hillocks swelling at the day's drawn loveliness,
Blue skies, dappled white, wind darkened water,
Blown spindrift on the ocean's loneliness,
Moon shadowed spider's web on a white deck.

Dolphin Striker plunging where the Trade Wind blows,
Mystic fire at sunset where the Saint's light glows,
Muddy swirl and eddy where the flood tide flows.

Grey waves slapping at metal clad magnificence,
Red rust and black smoke, oil smothered water,
Iron monster, raping slender innocence,
My white capped lady love of long ago.

Narrow tops'ls straining at the break of day,
Canvas thrashing as she luffs and pays away,
Salted dead eyes dripping with a lash of spray.

HUGH FALKUS

I CANNOT tell their wonder nor make known
Magic that once thrilled through me to the bone,
But all men praise some beauty, tell some tale,
Vent a high mood which makes the rest seem pale,
Pour their heart's blood to flourish one green leaf,
Follow some Helen for her gift of grief . . .

For one may haunt the pier a score of times
Hearing St. Nicholas' bells ring out the chimes,
Yet never see those proud ones swaying home,
With mainyards backed and bows a cream of foam,
Those bows so lovely-curving, cut so fine
Those coulters of the many-bubbled brine,
As once, long since, when all the docks were filled
With that sea beauty man has ceased to build.

JOHN MASEFIELD

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MAN WITH TWO HANDS

It had a life of its own—and a quite separate personality

by PETER FLEMING

I CANNOT now remember what the meeting was about; it took place several years ago. Most senior Civil Servants attend a great number of meetings. One cannot be expected to remember everything about them and, since the particulars are easily available from the minutes in the files, it would in any case be superfluous to attempt to do so. I know that this one was held in my own Ministry, and I recall that among those present were Clerrifer from the Treasury and someone from the Ministry of Supply who arrived very late, smoking a cigar.

I also remember, and am unlikely to forget, that the typewritten agenda paper contained the line: "*To discuss the implications arising from the decision to . . .*" These were the first words I wrote with my left hand, and I copied them out on a sheet of foolscap about twenty times. It was perfectly easy to follow the proceedings of the dull discussion while carrying out this—to me—novel exercise in calligraphy. It helped to pass the time, and it was satisfactory to see the clumsy script gradually becoming less babyish. The meeting passed more quickly than usual.

As I have never been fond of animals, I suppose you might describe as ironical the fact that it was two animals—a horse and a dog—who, although I never saw them, were responsible for my starting to practise writing with my left hand. The horse belonged to my niece Dolores, an irresponsible and disrespectful girl, and, a few months before the meeting the horse threw my niece and she broke her right arm. Her mother being dead and her father, as far as anybody knows, residing in the Argentine, I felt it my duty to go and see the girl after her accident.

I found Dolores in her usual flippant mood, full of tasteless facetiousness about bureaucrats and coarse innuendoes about my relations with my secretary; and the only unexpected thing that emerged during our short interview was the fact that she was teaching herself to write with her left hand.

"You never know," she explained, "I may break my right arm

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again, and one feels such a fool not being able to answer invitations, or write love letters or keep one's diary."

I had seen in the girl's character so little to suggest that she possessed the capacity for such forethought and self discipline that I could not help feeling surprised, and thus the idea of learning to write with one's left hand first entered my mind.

Two or three weeks later it was revived. The Minister had accepted an invitation to pay an official visit to Ireland, where he was going to be shown at first hand some exceedingly interesting experimental work connected, as far as I can remember, with the conversion of dehydrated peat into blotting paper. Tours of this kind, though necessarily strenuous, are of inestimable value to public servants, and when it was known that Crotheroe had been selected to accompany the Minister, we all envied him his luck. Crotheroe is an able man, but he is still a comparatively junior member of the Department, and it soon emerged that he owed his good fortune partly if not largely to the fact that he was a trained shorthand typist. Our Chief, as he likes to be called, hoped, I think, to make some political capital by taking with him only a single member of his Department who could combine the functions of adviser and secretary.

They were due to fly to Ireland on a Tuesday. On the Monday Crotheroe arrived in the office with his right hand bandaged; he had been bitten by his wife's dog during the weekend, and this lost him not only his trip to Ireland but also the opportunity of making an impression on the Minister.

I was so deeply impressed by this demonstration of the far reaching and adverse consequences which might stem from a temporary inability to write with the hand you were taught to write with, that I began to think seriously of learning to use my left hand for that purpose.

I have, I think, said enough to show that the idea of teaching myself to write with my left hand was one which I had plenty of opportunities to put into practice, without either neglecting my public duties or encroaching upon my own leisure hours. For a man with a trained mind it is not difficult to do two things at once, provided they are not particularly important things; one can, for instance, sign departmental correspondence while speaking on the telephone. On that first fateful afternoon I discovered that it was perfectly easy to copy out with my left hand "*To discuss the implications arising from the decision to*" while following the drift of the discussion in the Conference Room. I wrote the phrase again and again deriving from the unaccustomed exercise the same soothing kind of distraction which, I imagine, women find in knitting.

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But I did not allow myself to weary of the exercise. I do things, if I do them at all, because I think they are worth doing; and worth doing well. I had seen, in the case of Crotheroe, how vital a reasonable degree of ambidexterity may be to a man's career, how damaging the lack of it. My habits make it extremely unlikely that I shall ever be bitten on the hand by a dog, and the fact that nothing will induce me to mount a horse precludes, as far as can be foreseen, the possibility of my falling off one; but there are other ways of losing temporarily the use of your right hand. So I addressed myself to the task of training my left hand with firm but unobtrusive concentration.

Soon my left hand was forming what might be termed an adult script at a reasonable pace. I was intrigued to note that its handwriting was almost as different as it would be possible to be from my own: from the writing, that is to say, of my right hand. This is a fine, somewhat angular script that has, I like to feel, a certain scholarly distinction, an air about it of precision and exactitude.

My left hand, by contrast, wrote in what I can only call a dashing way, making thick, purposeful letters which flowed forward—embellished with flamboyant downward strokes and aggressive flourishes—like a company of soldiers charging. No doubt an expert in these matters could, by a process of detailed analysis, have determined that both scripts had ultimately a common origin—that the formation of both had been directed and controlled by the brain of one man; but I am quite sure that a layman would never have guessed it.

To my colleagues on the various committees and subcommittees during whose sessions I was able to develop the training of my left hand I said nothing of my—as I thought—harmless and indeed constructive hobby. At the conference table I presented very much the same appearance as they did—my head propped on one hand, my eyes half closed, a file or two on the table in front of me, the other hand pencilling idly—as they supposed—on a pad of foolscap—while we listened to the often protracted deliberations. Not infrequently, of course, the discussions took a turn which necessitated my intervention; and on such occasions, naturally, my hobby was forgotten and my left hand had an afternoon off.

I am not, as I think I have said, fond of animals and I have never kept a pet of any kind. But at an early stage I found myself regarding the achievements of my left hand—at first clumsy, then promising, and finally surprisingly creditable—with much the same feeling of anxious and affectionate pride with which, I imagine, the owner of a puppy watches its progress. In this way I came imperceptibly to look on my left hand, as soon as it took up a pencil and started to write, as having almost an independent existence.

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When handling a fork or helping to tie a shoelace, lifting the telephone receiver or switching out the light beside my bed, it was merely a part of me, automatically and unquestionably my servant. But when I encouraged it to take the unaccustomed pencil and address itself to what might be termed extra departmental duties I found myself crediting it with a measure of independence. The words it learned to form, its steadily increasing aptitude were not, I somehow felt, my own achievement; they were something we had accomplished jointly, my left hand and I.

The kindergarten phase of its education, during which I obliged it to copy out again and again short extracts from the minutes or from any other available papers, was deliberately prolonged until a mature script had formed itself. I remember now that my left hand was becoming a trifle restive. My brain—cool, orderly and purposeful as usual—would transmit to it the order to commence copying out some formal businesslike sentences.

There was, I am perfectly certain, no question of myself being bored or impatient with a routine task which occupied only a small part of my mind; it had become an automatic and rather agreeable habit. Although I was sometimes faintly and fleetingly conscious of a sort of tingling feeling in my left hand, these symptoms were so slight as to be scarcely perceptible, and at the time I paid little attention to them. Looking back on it, however, I discern in these trivial aberrations the first signs of my left hand's intransigence.

The second set of symptoms was of a more overt and circumstantial nature. When my new handwriting was sufficiently cursive, I promoted my left hand to the transcription of familiar quotations. They had, of course, to be quotations which were familiar to me, and when I came to ransack the treasure chest of my memory I found that by far the most suitable of its contents for the purpose were the words of hymns. These constituted the bulk of the literary material which I knew by heart.

One can—I do not say that one does—sing a familiar hymn in church without thinking about the words at all; and I found that virtually no cerebration was necessary to keep my left hand moving steadily down the foolscap, leaving behind it a neat echelon of verses. There was at this stage no recurrence of the hot, tingling sensation and the writing seemed to flow forward more smoothly than before. In the partnership between myself and my left hand my own rôle had almost been reduced to a supervisory one.

I must confess that at this stage the hope was often present in my mind that some occasion would arise on which my new mind, and, as it were, home made gift could demonstrate its usefulness to my colleagues.

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One day I found myself sitting next to Chublock at a conference. Although he is slightly senior to me, we are old friends and during our early days in the service enjoyed many a hard fought game of dominoes during the lunch hour. I had not seen him for some time, for during the war he had been sent to America but he had been recalled for a short tour of duty in Whitehall, where he could get an up to date picture of our problems and achievements before returning to his American post.

We were both pleased to see each other again and arranged to dine together on the following evening, but we had scant opportunity for conversation before the Chairman declared the meeting open.

Later in the afternoon there was a short break for tea, and the first thing that Chublock said to me was, " You never used to be left handed, did you ? "

" I'm not," I said, with a smile of justifiable pride. Chublock, seated on my right, was gazing curiously at the sheets of foolscap on which my left hand had been quietly and methodically working its way through the course of Christmas hymns. " I've been teaching myself to write with my left hand in case I should ever need to do so."

" You are a queer fellow," said Chublock. " But that's not at all like your ordinary writing, is it ? "

" Not in the least," I agreed. " Judge for yourself."

And I passed him a short *aide-memoire*, written with my right hand, which I had brought to the meeting and with it the top sheet of foolscap on which my left hand had been working with unobtrusive industry.

Chublock examined them—my own neat, rather spidery script and the bold, almost vulgar lettering favoured by my left hand. As he peered at the latter a curious expression came over his face, and he raised his eyes to mine with a look of surprise and disapproval.

At that moment our Chairman called the meeting to order and we resumed our business. Chublock, with a somewhat peremptory gesture, passed the two sheets of paper back to me and concentrated his attention on the draft under discussion.

Before following his example I scrutinized the sheet of foolscap on which the efforts of my left hand had prompted him to react in so unaccountable a manner. It was headed Hymn No. —, and underneath this I saw, with feelings of the most acute embarrassment, that my left hand had written :

While shepherds washed their socks by night,
All seated round the tub,
A cake of household soap came down
And they began to scrub.

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The residue of the hymn had been recast in the same vein of blasphemous parody.

The discovery made me feel quite ill. Gathering up my papers and muttering some incoherent excuse across the table to the Chairman, I left the conference room. The next morning my secretary received a message to the effect that Chublock was unavoidably prevented from keeping our dinner engagement; and a fortnight later he returned to Washington without any attempt having been made by either of us to renew our old friendship.

The exposure, in such regrettable circumstances, of an act of indiscipline amounting to treachery by my left hand caused me deep and painful anxiety.

I had increased my efficiency as part of a deliberate design, and with what result? I had shocked and offended a colleague who was not only an old friend but a senior member of the Department, whose estimate of my character might one day have an important bearing on my career. And the dreadful thing was that I had not the remotest idea how this discreditable *contretemps* had come about!

I am, and I always have been, a serious minded person. I have been a churchwarden for the past eleven years. Anything less characteristic of me than to write out during an inter-departmental conference the whole of a vulgar parody of a well known hymn it would be impossible to imagine. I was forced to the frightening conclusion that my left hand was—at any rate when engaged in the act of writing—not only possessed of a will of its own but animated by some form of intelligence which had nothing to do with my own brain or at any rate with what I knew of my own brain. I found this conclusion disturbing in the extreme.

However, these tests showed that my worst fears were groundless. Shaken by my humiliating experience with Chublock I had been prepared for a more or less open revolt, and the docility with which my left hand performed—admittedly under close supervision—the tasks allotted to it was reassuring.

As I prepared to leave my office on the evening of the third day I had largely regained my equanimity, though I was still puzzled.

The telephone rang as I was locking up my safe. It proved to be a long distance call from Dorset, where Bott, the Regional Controller of the Ministry's Western District headquarters, was handling an awkward situation which had arisen as a result of misunderstandings about the provisional decision to re-zone the allocation of linoleum priorities. I had a long talk with Bott, who seemed to think that some sort of blunder had been made, and managed to pacify him by pointing out that the decision was in any case only provisional.

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When he rang off I replaced the receiver, rose to my feet and was about to leave when my eye happened to fall on the blotter. There, boldly and only too skilfully executed by my disengaged hand was a drawing in thick blue pencil of a nude female in an unmistakably provocative posture!

My feelings may be better imagined than described. I hastily removed the topmost sheet of blotting paper and stuffed it into my brief case. It was, or had been, a clean sheet and to have torn it up and left the fragments in the wastepaper basket would have excited the curiosity of the charwoman. As I did so I shuddered to think of the impression which the drawing—had I not noticed it in time—would have produced on Miss Bowlby, who always clears my desk before my arrival in the morning. I had had a narrow escape, and decided that I must seek the advice of a psychologist.

I obtained the name of Dr. Julius Kleb—"*Progressive psychologist. Consultations completely confidential*" was how the advertisement described him. He gave an address in South London, and I made an appointment to see him on the following Saturday morning.

Before I kept this appointment I went to see Aunt Chloe, my only relation, now a very old lady residing in Highgate. I had remembered that my unfortunate sister had been left handed and it occurred to me that if, in the earliest stages of my career, I had shown any left handed tendencies the fact might conceivably throw some light on the extraordinary developments of the last few days. My aunt was surprised by the nature of my enquiry, the purpose of which I naturally concealed from her, but no more surprised than I was by what she told me.

I had, she said, as a baby shown every sign of being left handed like my sister, but this tendency had been carefully suppressed by my parents, who had been at great pains to train me to do everything as if I were naturally right handed. Their reasons for taking this course, which would nowadays be regarded as extremely ill-advised, were based on the fact that my father's brother, who had been left handed, had led a profligate and disreputable life and that my older sister was an extremely naughty and uncontrollable girl. In a somewhat superstitious way my parents felt that by suppressing my left handedness they might reduce the possibility of my taking after my uncle and my sister; and, although their belief was almost certainly based on a fallacy, my character undoubtedly did develop on lines very different from those of my two irresponsible relations.

Primed by my aunt with what seemed to me a potentially relevant piece of information, I made my way in due course to the sanctum of the progressive psychologist. Dr. Kleb was an imposing

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man with a shock of iron grey hair, a slight foreign accent, a pale blue tie and exceptionally piercing eyes. He placed me in a low armchair beside his desk, took down certain particulars such as my age, occupation, state of health and so forth and then invited me to tell him frankly why I had sought his assistance.

I am not greatly given to talking about myself but I confess that I found enjoyment as well as relief in narrating, for the first time, the strange history of my embarrassing predicament. On concluding, I handed the doctor my documentary evidence—the sheet of foolscap headed "Hymn No. —" and the piece of blotting paper on which my left hand had done the prurient drawing. He seemed particularly interested in the sketch and gazed at it for some time in silence.

I asked him, at length, what he made of my case.

"It is remarkable," he said, pushing the drawing to one side. "It is wonderfully interesting. There is in you something hitherto dormant or repressed which only now can express itself. The difference between the hand with which we write and our other hand is, so to speak, like the difference between a man and a beast. One has the gift of expression, the other has not.

"Now you, sir, have, instead of a man and a beast, two men on the ends of your arms. The left hand, the hand you have newly trained, enables some part of your brain for the first time to express things which it has never been allowed to express through your mouth or through your right hand. It is probable— But first, let me see you write something with your left hand."

He passed me a large pad of notepaper. I placed it on my knee and took out my fountain pen.

"Does it matter what I write?" I asked.

"Write out the Hymn again," said Dr. Kleb. "*While shepherds washed their socks by night.* Write that." He laughed rather coarsely.

Then, for the third time, my left hand betrayed me. Instead of the bold and dashing script of the original I found myself painfully fashioning the gawkish, unformed letters in which, months ago, I had laboriously spelt out that first fatal sentence "*To discuss the implications arising from the decision to.*" The sensation was extraordinary. It was as if I had suddenly found that I could not open my mouth. As the nib tacked shakily to and fro on the paper I began to sweat. I could feel Dr. Kleb's eyes on me.

"It's no good," I said. "I can't understand it." I felt angry and humiliated.

A sort of film seemed to have formed over the psychologist's piercing eyes. "Try and draw something with your left hand," he suggested. I tried to draw a cat, but of course it was no good; the cat was childish and lopsided.

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Dr. Kleb was sympathetic in a perfunctory way. No doubt I was tired; I had been concentrating too much on my left hand and it had temporarily lost its powers. But I could see that privately he believed me to be an impostor, an exhibitionist who had concocted a fantastic story in order to enlist interest in himself. He questioned me further in an indifferent and sometimes rather embarrassing way about my personal habits, gave me some meaningless general advice, charged me an exorbitant fee and wished me good day. I went home and retired to bed, feeling very upset.

This incident marked, I think, a turning point in the whole affair. Up till then I had regarded myself as having the initiative and my left hand as being, like a pet monkey, a creature which, though capable of mischief, could only perpetrate it on a small scale and at times when my vigilance was relaxed. But within a few hours of leaving the psychologist I was given startling evidence both of its malice and of its readiness to take the offensive.

I retired, as I say, to bed, greatly troubled in my mind, and in due course must have fallen asleep. From this merciful oblivion I was rudely awakened by a succession of peremptory rings on the front door bell of my flat.

Rising in a somewhat dazed condition from my bed I passed through the living room and opened the door. What was my dismay and astonishment to perceive three police officers on the landing outside! They pushed their way somewhat brusquely into the flat and closed the door.

There followed an extremely embarrassing interview. It was clear both from their words and their deeds that the officers believed my flat to have been the scene of some act of violence, and when they found that this was not the case they were strongly disposed to regard me as a hoaxer. When I at last succeeded in establishing both my identity and my complete ignorance of what was, or was supposed to be, afoot, they so far relented as to explain the reason for their visit.

An hour or so ago Whitehall 1212 had been dialled from what subsequent enquiries at the telephone exchange had proved to be my flat. One of the operators on duty answered the call but could hear nothing except a faint tapping which he quickly recognized as the S.O.S. call in Morse. After a short delay while the call was traced to my flat, a patrol car set out at headlong speed and its occupants had been on the point of breaking down my front door when I let them in.

By this time the truth had dawned on me. While I slept, my left hand had removed the receiver and—guided by its sense of

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touch—dialled the Scotland Yard number and then tapped out—probably on the mouthpiece—its appeal for help. The cunning and audacity of this trick appalled me. It was naturally impossible for me to explain what had happened to the police, and before they left the flat they obliged me to make, and sign, a long statement in which I included the probability that the whole thing was due to my somnambulistic tendencies.

When they had gone I sat down, spread my left hand out on the table in front of me and gazed at it for a long time. It looked innocent enough. I turned it over and wondered whether any useful purpose would be served by taking it to a palmist, who might be able to read in its lines some clue to the mystery surrounding it. But after my experience with Dr. Kleb I hardly liked to expose it to anything in the nature of a scientific diagnosis. The incident of the telephone had shown that its malign activities were not necessarily limited to wielding pencil or pen. What was there to stop it from causing me to perform some disgraceful act?

I had now formed my own theory about the same cause of its aberrations. Something that Dr. Kleb had said stuck in my mind—"You have two men on the ends of your arms." Although he had not quite meant it like that I was convinced, in the light of my aunt's revelation, that there resided within me a second personality—the personality which could have developed had my parents not suppressed my left handedness in infancy. Differing sharply from my own character and no doubt in some degree embittered and distorted by its years of imprisonment, this *alter ego* had now been provided with limited means of expressing itself.

When my left hand wrote, it wrote in the handwriting that would have been mine if Nature had been allowed to take her course. Its spelling mistakes, its deplorable vulgarity, its mischievous irresponsibility were all facets of the character originally implanted in me but repressed, modified and I think I may safely say ennobled by a strict and careful upbringing. I was, and yet was not, my own worst enemy. The question was, how to frustrate its designs?

These, I decided on reflection, were unlikely to include the most extreme measures. My left hand would not, for instance, attempt to strangle me or cut my throat, for by so doing it would bring its own career to an end. Similar considerations militated against the possibility of its causing me to commit some offence which might result in my being sent to prison. I felt rather than knew that my *alter ego* would never do anything which would result in its liberty of action being curtailed. Far more likely, I considered, was that its object was to humiliate me and cause me to look ridiculous. It was against this that I must guard.

But how? Short of inducing—again, how?—a doctor to put

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the whole of my arm in plaster I could think of no means. My only hope, as I saw it, of subduing this rebellion was by gradually imposing my will on that of my *alter ego* until, even if it retained a measure of independence, it conformed to ordinary decent standards of behaviour. I confess that I did not feel particularly sanguine as to the prospects; but I found some reassurance in the thought that the advantage which my *alter ego* had hitherto enjoyed—the advantage of surprise—was now lost to it. I was now on my guard.

This posture of defence proved exacting and wearisome. The various ways in which a man's left hand can attempt to undermine his position in society are surprisingly numerous. At the occasional social functions which I have to attend, I constantly found myself holding a brimming cocktail glass which my left hand had abstracted from a passing tray and whose contents too often proved surplus to my requirements. After a visit to a well known shop I discovered in my trouser pocket a flimsy but ingenious contrivance clearly intended to support or contain the female bosom, and thenceforward I had to give up all shopping for fear of being apprehended as a common thief. On one of my rare journeys out of London only some inequality in the permanent way thwarted, by causing the railway carriage to lurch, my left hand's designs upon the communication cord; and once, acting with uncanny swiftness and precision, it locked me in the lavatory at my Club and threw the key out of the window.

The strain imposed upon my nerves by the necessity for maintaining a perpetual state of vigilance was very considerable; but for some three weeks I succeeded, though often by a narrow margin, in frustrating the attempts of my left hand to sabotage my career.

The climax to this state of personal civil war came about as the result of a paper which I had written during my last annual holiday about the size of the Civil Service. For some years now this topic has periodically attracted ill-informed outcries from the Press, whose invariable contention it is that the number of civil servants employed is excessive. Nettled by one of these attacks and confined to my seaside lodgings by a spell of inclement weather, I wrote a letter to *The Times* proving conclusively that the Civil Service was, if anything, under-staffed to cope with its increasingly heavy and increasingly complex responsibilities. The letter, though closely reasoned, ran to some two thousand words and the Editor was, I suppose, within his rights in regretting that he could not find space for it. But on the suggestion of a friend I submitted it to the Journal of the Civil Service Association as an article, with the challenging title *Are We Too Numerous?*

This article duly appeared at about the time when my trouble

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with my left hand started. It caught the eye of an official of the B.B.C. with whom I have some slight personal acquaintance, and I was approached with the surprising but flattering suggestion that I should take part in the popular weekly television programme called *Let's Thrash It Out*, in which various topics of the day were debated in front of the cameras by three or four individuals with special knowledge or experience of them. The panel on which I was asked to serve was to discuss the question *Are There Too Many Civil Servants?*

Before accepting the invitation I naturally sought the views of the Permanent Under Secretary on the propriety of my doing so and was gratified to find that both he and the Chief were warmly in favour of my taking part in the programme. They stipulated only that the Ministry to which I belonged—and also, if possible, the Chief's name—should be included in the announcer's introduction.

When I arrived at Alexandra Palace for a preliminary rehearsal, I found my fellow debaters to consist of the following:

(a) Lord Grilse, a deceptively courteous old gentleman who spends most of his time on his dwindling estates in the country, is chairman of his County Council and has some standing as an expert on the administration of rural areas.

(b) J. K. Civett, the popular historian, broadcaster and publicist. Knowing him to be an ardent advocate of nationalisation in almost all its forms, I felt that I could count on his support for my contention that our civil service, so far from being too large, is if anything too small.

(c) Miss Delilah Renstock, a strikingly beautiful young lady who was, I discovered, an architect of promise and who had recently made a remarkably effective fighting speech at a protest meeting organized by the inhabitants of some remote valley where the authorities proposed to construct a new Satellite Town. I surmised that she was unlikely to be on my side.

I had never been in a Television Studio before and I found the technical arrangements for our rehearsal interesting though bewildering. The rehearsal itself was hardly enjoyable. Sitting uncomfortably close together at a small table we embarked, under the guidance of a glib young man who acted as chairman, on an exchange of viewpoints. Civett and I, it soon emerged, agreed that there had been far too much irresponsible criticism of our great bureaucratic machine. Lord Grilse and Miss Renstock were on the opposite side, and a keen and potentially heated argument developed, in which Lord Grilse's mellifluous and insinuating interventions were, in their specious way, only less effective than the more out

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spoken denunciations of his attractive ally. I found myself giving way increasingly to irritation, particularly as my own contributions, or attempted contributions, tended to be cut short or suppressed altogether by Civett, whose long experience of broadcasting enabled him to do this with a very natural air.

In the end, however, we worked out with the producer's help an agreed procedure, and on the following day a verbatim transcript of our discussion was sent to each of us to serve as a basis for the actual broadcast.

This took place at 8 p.m. on a Friday night. After—not without protest—having had my face powdered in the make-up room I joined the others in the studio. Lord Grilse and I wore dinner jackets, J. K. Civett was clad in the rough tweeds which he habitually affects and Miss Renstock wore an extremely becoming low cut evening dress of some subfusc material. A stout man dressed as a Viking was talking to the producer but he, of course, withdrew before the time came for us to commence.

The producer ran over briefly the order in which we were to speak, and warned us once more against the commonest mistakes to which the inexperienced are prone when they face the camera for the first time. We took our places at the small table, and a few moments later a red light warned us that we were on the air and we heard the announcer's voice introducing the programme from another part of the studio.

We had been told that, while he did this, the camera would pick out in close-up each of our faces in turn as the announcer identified us, and in due course I heard him say, "*And here, finally, is one of these much discussed bureaucrats in person . . .*" I realized that, beyond the mysterious lens into which I obediently directed my gaze, some hundreds of thousands of my fellow citizens were looking at me.

Before I knew what had happened my left hand had cocked a snook at them!

It acted with the speed of a striking snake and was back in its place, lying inert and innocent on the table beside me, while the announcer was saying "*. . . well qualified to represent the viewpoint of a Service whose high traditions he has upheld for nearly forty years.*"

It was a ghastly moment and yet in the studio itself, though I heard a sharp intake of breath from the chairman and was aware of startled glances from my fellow debaters, no notice was, or as I afterwards realized, could have been, taken of my dreadful aberration; and as a result the panic and embarrassment which at first gripped me quickly gave way to an ill-founded feeling of relief. In the absence of any noticeable reactions to my misdemeanour I half-persuaded myself that it had not been noticed.

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I learned later that this was far from being the case. *Let's Thrash It Out* is a short feature, lasting only a quarter of an hour, and on this particular evening it was to be followed by ringside views of a pugilistic contest in which there was considerable public interest. Consequently a larger audience than might normally have been expected had given up the evening to television. There was, it seems, no question of their failing to observe that I had cocked a snook at them. The vulgar and insulting gesture, suddenly and, as they imagined, deliberately superimposed on my serious, composed and purposeful features, attracted instant attention. Outlying viewers were summoned urgently to the set, diners in clubs and restaurants gulped down their coffee and made bee lines for the smoking room or lounge whence rumours—greatly exaggerated in many cases—of my extraordinary behaviour spread like wildfire.

After that initial lapse, however, our debate proceeded smoothly though warmly. Latecomers who had not seen me cock my snook were, I was told, incredulous. Those who had seen it remained in a state of keen expectancy. They could not rid their minds of the unforgettable contrast between the guttersnipe's gesture and the elderly, not undignified bureaucrat lucidly and forcefully arguing that it would be madness to reduce the numerical strength of the Civil Service. "He's a deep one," they chuckled. "You just wait."

Alas, their confidence was well justified. In the heat of the debate, I forgot altogether the danger from my left hand. I had reached a passage in which I was endeavouring to impress upon my audience the sheer volume of the paper work which accrues, every week, in all branches of the Civil Service—the perpetually circulating files, the massive despatch boxes, the new sets of regulations, the interdepartmental minutes; the veritable deluge of documents which threatens to swamp the desk of an official who relaxes for even an hour.

In particular I was addressing Miss Renstock, who sat on my left and who had spoken slightingly of civil servants who spent their time drinking tea and doing crossword puzzles. "I only wish, Miss Renstock," I concluded, "that I could persuade you to spend a day with me in my office. I feel sure that it would alter your outlook if you did."

The words were not out of my mouth when my left hand, darting forth, clasped the young lady round the waist and drew her convulsively towards me. We were seated so close together that her shapely head, after striking me violently on the jaw, lodged for a moment on my shirt-front and my pincenez, jarred from my nose, became entangled in her hair. My left hand, the mischief done, relaxed its hold instantaneously.

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Horror struck, I rose unsteadily to my feet, only to find that I was tethered by the ribbon of my pincenez to Miss Renstock's somewhat elaborate coiffure. Somebody disengaged me and I was led away. As I went, I heard the announcer's voice saying something about a technical hitch. This was followed by the sound of music.

I pretended that I had been taken ill, and everyone at Alexandra Palace was very kind to me; awe, rather than disapproval, seemed to dominate the emotions which underlay their solicitude. An official drove me back to South Kensington in his car and with considerable resource staged a tactical diversion which decoyed away a sizeable crowd of photographers and reporters for just long enough to enable me to slip into my flat unobserved. The telephone rang continuously until I disconnected it.

After a sleepless night I rose early next morning and, having confirmed that the whole of the popular Press had treated my astonishing behaviour as front page news, packed a bag and left London by train for the North. Before nightfall I was installed in a small temperance hotel in a district where science had not yet made available television. The next day I forwarded to the Ministry my request for permission to resign on grounds of ill health. It was accepted in a matter of days. My left hand had won.

I had acquired in the course of my life no interest outside my departmental duties, and when I had recovered from the strain and shock of my frightful experience I found that time hung so heavily on my hands, and life seemed so dark and empty, that I more than once quite seriously contemplated suicide. I slept badly, and took to dozing off over a book after luncheon in the small but comfortable sitting room which I had taken.

One afternoon, on awaking from this not particularly congenial siesta, I was surprised to find a loose sheet of paper on my lap. My left hand had torn the fly-leaf out of the novel I was reading and written a note in it. "*Sorry*," said the note. "*Afraid I went a bit far. But don't worry, we've got a great future.*" The note was unsigned, but underneath there was a postscript: "*Some foolscap, please*," was all it said.

Though it may seem an odd admission, I was extraordinarily touched and relieved by this note. I had ceased greatly to fear any possible future activities by my left hand, for I reckoned that to the injuries which it had inflicted on me it could make no material additions; it had done its worst, it could bring me no lower than I was already. I was nevertheless—or had hitherto been—aware of it as something malevolent, spiteful and unscrupulous from which there could be no escape. This sudden and spontaneous softening, though I did not of course dare to take it entirely at its face value,

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came so unexpectedly into my lonely, downcast existence that I was overcome with disproportionately strong emotions of gratitude. It was as though the capacity to hope had been restored to me. I went out into the gathering November dusk, walked down the High Street and purchased a quantity of foolscap paper and two self-propelling pencils.

After tea I sat down in front of my gasfire with the writing materials arranged on a blotter on my lap. I privately thought that my left hand, if it intended to write or draw, would only do so while I was asleep, and sleep at that juncture was out of the question. But my left hand was not in the least shy or self-conscious. It picked up one of the pencils, adjusted the paper to its liking and proceeded with some deliberation to write out, in block capitals and one underneath the other, various groups of words.

Witness the Fireflies was the first group. Then came *No Tiger Intruded* and then, after a pause, *The Bride Wore a Bush Shirt.* This last was instantly scratched out. It was followed by *Jungle Tryst, Monsoon Madness* and *Hinterland Honeymoon.* I had just tumbled to the fact that my left hand was drafting alternative titles for a book, play or film, presumably of a sensational nature, when it pushed the top sheet impatiently to the floor and began to write in earnest.

" Psst ! "

Angela started. From a tangle of lush undergrowth below her the tall figure of a man detached itself.

" Miss Prendergast, may I have a word with you ? "

The words came in a tense, strained whisper. Suddenly aware that her diaphanous nightie must be revealing more than any man had as yet earned the right to behold, Angela, her face mantling, slipped behind a convenient pillar.

" Who are you ? " she asked in a low voice.

" My name is Clandarcy," replied the shadowy figure. " We were fellow passengers on the Pondicherry. *I had the pleasure of playing shuffleboard against you."*

Angela's senses reeled. Major the Earl of Clandarcy, a reserved, inscrutable figure, had joined the ship at Port Said. Rumour had it that he was on a secret mission to Hongkong. Angela vividly recalled the tall, lithe figure pacing the deck, seemingly unconscious of those about him : the tanned and hawk-like features forever gazing abstractedly out to sea : and her own secret conviction that, behind this almost forbidding air of mystery and distinction there lurked the shy, gay heart of a boy. But what was he doing here ?

" Hadn't you," she faltered, " better come up here ? There are snakes in the compound."

With a panther-like bound the earl was beside her. The last time she had seen him he had been wearing a faultlessly cut dinner-jacket ;

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now he wore—and looked no less well in—the rough habiliments of an Asiatic tribesman.

" Wait here," she adjured him, " while I fetch a wrap."

" Be quick then," he whispered. " Your life is in danger. There is not a moment to lose."

Her head in a whirl, Angela sped across the verandah to the French window of her bedroom. Was it her imagination, or did she hear a sharp intake of breath as the moonlight more fully revealed her youthful charms to the mysterious visitor? . . ."

Thus began the successful literary career of an authoress whose name, which it would be neither proper nor prudent for me to disclose, is familiar to you all. I cannot say that I myself greatly admire the works which she so untiringly produces, but I find them eminently readable, and for all I know many of the dramatic situations which she delights to describe may arise more frequently in foreign parts than they do in this country, where it is, for instance, unthinkable that a young girl should be lashed in a state of nudity to the back of a mad elephant and almost equally unlikely that, if she were, she would be rescued by a peer of the realm, even if he had happened to win the pole-vault at Sandhurst. But although the leading critics have consistently ignored the productions of my left hand there can be no doubt that they give immense pleasure to a very wide circle of readers.

To me they have brought in an affluence which I cannot regard as undeserved. I find my duties as confidential secretary to a celebrated authoress perfectly congenial; and the fact that the gifted creature does not exist lends a certain piquancy to them. I type out her manuscripts, correct her proofs and reply—in my own precise, angular handwriting—to her voluminous fan mail. Readers asking for her autograph, always get it. But sometimes they ask for her photograph too, and those who have solicited this favour from a female novelist and have been disappointed possess a clue to one of the most curious literary secrets of our time.

* * *

SQUELCH!

" Maestro," a bore asked Rossini, " do you remember that dinner given for you at Milan when they served a gigantic macaroni pie? Well, I was seated next to you."

" Indeed? " said the composer. " I recall the macaroni perfectly."

Etude

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OUTLOOK UNSETTLED

With hey, ho, the winde and the raine!

Drinking beyond the holy bounds embitters my retrospection and stains my virtues.
Beware of blaspheming in relation to the weather : a vulgar impious practice.

DR. RUTTY, *Quaker doctor of Dublin, in a Journal, February*, 1756

Dazed

It is right that the North should have the best terms for cold. The South has lost the use of daze for numb, narrowing its usage to strong effects on eye and brain, just as it has limited 'starve' to matters of appetite. The Yorkshire child who, when settled in an air-raid shelter of the dank and draughty kind, cried out to his mother, 'Ee Moom, ba goom, ma boom is noom' might have called his posterior dazed had he lived a little earlier. In Scotland the use of daze does, I believe, linger. How well it sits in Gavin Douglas's sharp, clear, and tingling description of a Scottish winter.

In this congealit season sharp and chill,
The caller air penetrative and pure,
Dazing the blude in every creature,
Made seek warm stovis and bene fyris hot.
In double garment cled and wyliecoat,
With michty drink, and meatis confortive . . .

IVOR BROWN, *A Word in Your Ear*

Iced Cornet

I recovered my liberty and left St. Petersburgh . . . The winter was then so uncommonly severe all over Europe, that ever since the sun seems to be frost-bitten . . .

I travelled post day and night, and finding myself engaged in a narrow lane, I bid the postilion give a signal with his horn, that other travellers might not meet or stop us in the narrow passage. He blew with all his might, but all his endeavours were in vain. He could not make the horn speak . . . and rather unfortunately, for soon after we found ourselves in the presence of another coach coming the other way. It was very troublesome for both parties

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in this horrid weather . . . My poor postilion and everybody was almost froze to death. However we reached the much-looked-for stage, without further accident, and all of us hastened to warm and refresh ourselves.

The postilion hung his great coat and horn on a peg and sate down. Suddenly we heard a *Tereng! tereng, teng, teng!* We looked round, and now found the reason, why the postilion had not been able to sound his horn. His tunes were frozen up in the horn, and came out now by thawing, plain enough . . . so that the honest fellow entertained us for some time with a variety of tunes, without putting his mouth to the horn.

The King of Prussia's march—Over the hill and over the dale—an evening hymn, and many other favourite tunes came out, and the thawing entertainment concluded . . . with God bless Great George our King.

Singular Travels, Campaigns and Adventures of BARON MÜNCHAUSEN, *published* 1785

It's An Ill Wind

Winter is indeed a season that I would like to
apply an uncomplimentary name to . . .
And in all my life I have only known one man who
honestly liked winter better than summer,
Because every summer he used to have either his
tonsils or his appendix or something out,
and every winter he was a plumber.

OGDEN NASH

Elementals

No one endued with common sense but will deny that the Elements are obedient to witches and at their commandment, or that they may, at their pleasure, send rain, hail, tempests, thunder, lightning; when she, being but an old doting woman, casteth a flint-stone over her left shoulder . . . or boileth hog's bristles, or layeth sticks across upon a bank, where never a drop of water is: or buryeth sage till it be rotten . . .

REGINALD SCOT, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, 1584

Spring Fever

In the Spring I have counted one hundred and thirty six different kinds of weather inside of twenty four hours . . .

MARK TWAIN, *in a speech, 22nd December*, 1876

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Blue Skies Around The Corner

Landing suddenly in England, the first thing that would strike a stranger—as, indeed, a native returning after some months' absence—is the quantity of gardens . . .

Evidently, one would say, the English are very fond of gardens, or, at any rate, of flowers, for the cultivation of which they evince a genuine talent. And, indeed, in our climate flowers, I suppose, are a necessity, for we are a practical people . . . You look out of the window, forgetting which month it is. Green grass, rain, grey sky and a few red berries tell you that it is winter; green grass, rain, grey sky and a daffodil proclaim the spring more clearly than frisking lamb; green grass, rain, grey sky and an arch of Dorothy Perkins sufficiently indicate full summer; green grass, rain, grey sky and Michaelmas daisies signify autumn with all its mellow joys. (And, for this reason as much as for any better one, I object to horticultural novelties; dahlias which blossom in the spring and narcissi in the autumn; thus placing one wrong, if only for a moment in our map of the year.)

OSBERT SITWELL, *Penny Foolish*

Cauld Blaws The Wind

Up in the morning's no' for me,
Up in the morning early;
When a' the hills are cover'd wi' snaw
I'm sure it's winter fairly.

Cauld blaws the wind frae east to west,
The drift is driving sairly;
Sae loud and shrill's I hear the blast,
I'm sure it's winter fairly.

The birds sit chittering in the thorn,
A' day they fare but sparely;
And lang's the night frae e'en to morn;
I'm sure it's winter fairly.

ROBERT BURNS, 1759-1796

Further Outlook

The weather is beautiful; but as Noodle says—with his eyes beaming with delight—" We shall suffer for this, sir, by-and-by."

SYDNEY SMITH, *in a letter, 22nd December*, 1836

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THE DOOR

It might be anywhere in the world—waiting to fulfil an old man's curse

by LENNOX ROBINSON

I KNOW it will be difficult, if not impossible, to make this tale credible, my difficulties being added to by the fact that as the Greek is still alive, and many relations of the unlucky young men are still alive, I cannot give the name of the town in which the strange events took place nor the real names of any of the characters. I can only describe the town generally: a large English country town, almost a city, with a great noble ancient church and a broad river opening into the sea a few miles below the town; many of its streets are lined with Georgian houses in excellent preservation which are still inhabited by wealthy merchants and the old respected families who make up the town's "society."

These beautiful houses open directly on to the street. There is no dusty front garden, but at the back nearly every one of them possesses a large garden surrounded by high brick walls on which plums and pears ripen and wistaria and Gloire de Dijon roses blossom profusely. In short, it is one of those placid, rich, old-established towns of England.

It is rich because it had, and still has to some extent, much commercial traffic with the Continent and the people who live in these Georgian houses are mainly the descendants of forebears who made their wealth generations ago in foreign trade. That fact has created in the town a certain non-English element, and everyone connected with this story—except Miss Penrose and myself—is crossed with foreign blood.

First, the Greek. I shall call him Mavrocordato, though his real name was more ordinary than that. He had been born in the town where his grandfather had established himself as a trader in furniture. His son had changed the furniture business into a shop which dealt in antiques of the best kind—old silver, paintings, and precious stones.

The present Mavrocordato dealt in nothing but jewels, and if his turnover was not very large it mattered little to him, for he had inherited considerable wealth and, I imagine, only kept on the shop for the love he had for handling precious stones. He was

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well educated and had travelled much, especially in the East. He spoke many languages, and had a wonderful library with a unique collection of works on occultism, mysticism and folk lore.

He was unmarried—or was he? Was Anna, the beautiful girl who lived with him, really his niece, as he declared, or was she an illegitimate daughter, or his mistress? He seemed to have no other living relations. Anna had appeared suddenly a few years ago. She was eighteen then, of an exotic beauty that was almost conventional. I have heard one of the plainer girls of the town say she was like a "Light of the Harem" painted by a bad Academician in the eighties. At any rate, she was much more foreign looking than her uncle who, indeed, looked scarcely foreign at all.

Of the three unlucky young men, little need be said about two of them—Forbes and Newsom. They were idle, wealthy and dissipated. They had fast motor cars, speedboats on the river, and Newsom and Chadwick—the third of them—had 'planes. They played hard and drank hard; they were partly the terror of the town and partly its pride. Forbes' mother was Italian—dead long since, as was his father—Newsom was half Swede.

My employer, Chadwick, had Irish blood on both sides of his family. Of the three he seemed the wildest. He was also the wealthiest and owned a large part of the town, but he had no inclination to look after his property, and that is how I came to be engaged as his secretary and general factotum. We got on very well from the first, though I took no part in his escapades. He gradually turned over to me more and more of his affairs. I superintended his house as well as his business, ordered his food and wine and made all the arrangements for his wild bachelor parties. His parents were dead and he lived alone in his big house with its long garden stretching down to the river.

We had met at Oxford, and he took a fancy to me, though our tastes were very different. Then when he got sent down and I stayed and took my degree, we lost sight of each other. When I was through Oxford I couldn't get a job, but I met him by chance and he offered me this post. The pay was generous and, of course, I grabbed at the chance, and had been in his employment for about two years when this story opens.

You know how, when playing family bridge, sometimes one of the players is called away to answer the telephone or something, and in order not to hold up the game you are asked to play Aunt Maud's hand. You are told the trump and are given some vague idea as to what has already been played, but, of necessity, you play the hand rather blindly. I am in that condition regarding this affair; I "cut in" after the chief event had occurred, and I

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was never told exactly what it was. I was never told because Chadwick was too ashamed to speak of it openly. Not even in the diary that he gave me is the crime put down in black and white. I can only guess. And I am afraid I am driven inevitably to guess the worst.

Piecing it together, what seems to have happened was this: On a beautiful September evening the three young men motored some thirty miles away to dine at an old inn. They dined well and drank a great deal. Chadwick returns again and again to this fact as the only mitigating circumstances. "We were drunk," he used to repeat, "we were very drunk."

When the bill came, it was Forbes' turn to pay. He did so, but suddenly blurted out that he was stony-broke, practically bankrupt, and that he had borrowed large sums of money from Mr. Mavrocordato. All this was most surprising to the others, who had thought Forbes as wealthy as themselves—though not, perhaps, as wealthy as Chad—and they were not aware that the Greek lent money. He had done so, it appeared, for years, but as he only dealt in the most costly jewels, so he only lent to a very few clients—lent large sums to clients who were good "marks." Well, surely Forbes was a good mark! He was a sleeping partner in more than one large firm in the town; his uncle had just died and left him many thousands of pounds: some said ten, some twenty; and though it must be some months before he could touch his inheritance, it would come to him eventually, and all he had to do was to go to the Greek and get a further advance on his expectations.

But Forbes now confessed that his uncle, sickened by his nephew's dissipation, had cut him out of his will, and left the inheritance to more worthy relations. When Forbes learned the dreadful truth his *amour-propre* was too wounded for him to confess his disappointment. But there remained his other sources of income; surely something could be raised on them?

No. Mr. Mavrocordato had advanced all he cared to on that score; more, in fact, than they warranted, but there had always been the saving fact of the expected legacy in the background. Forbes had been that very day with the Greek trying to raise a loan, but had had to admit to him that he could no longer hope for anything from his uncle, and the Greek had refused so much as another hundred pounds. Forbes had threatened the Greek with exposure, and high words had passed between them, but all to no avail. As the day wore on, Forbes' wretched position made itself clearer to him: the unpaid debts, the inevitable bankruptcy, the end of his gay, carefree life.

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Finally, at night, sitting with his friends, he pulled out his well filled pocket book, and in search of sympathy he unburdened his mind.

He got sympathy in plenty. His friends vowed it was a damned shame; the Greek was a Jew of the worst description, and they would raise such a wind of public opinion against him that he would be forced to leave the town. They fanned each other's indignation, grew more extravagant in their statements as drunken men do, and exaggerated their powers. How was the Greek to be driven from the town? They called for another magnum of champagne.

Chad kept his head a little better than the others. After all, Mavrocordato was no mere shopkeeper with a moneylending business on the side. He was well known to them personally, practically of their set—though, of course, he didn't tear round the country in fast cars—but he was the respected friend of their elders, and the young men had been to his beautiful house on the rare occasions when he gave one of his parties—those parties which were always in some way unique. The Greek would provide some surprise entertainment; perhaps a famous singer from London. Years ago, Caruso had sung there, and once the garden had been transformed into a Hungarian café with a gipsy orchestra. On another occasion a very distinguished poet had read his verses in the drawing room. That time they all met the beautiful Anna—Anna who was so seldom seen in the town or at other parties. She was reported to be very learned and was working hard at Chinese, and practising her piano for many hours each day. She played no games and preferred her uncle's library or her music room to tennis and bridge. But when you did meet her you never thought of her as a pedant. Her manners were beautiful, and she made her uncle's guests very welcome. He, poor man, obviously adored her.

Yes, hang it all, Mavrocordato was a decent chap, and the girl was a peach. "Forby" had probably lost his temper that morning, and if the case were put before the old boy in a friendly way, not as moneylender and client, but as man to man, fellow citizen, old friend, the thing could be put right in five minutes.

That was Chad's opinion, and the thing should be done now—this very evening. Poor old "Forby" mustn't be allowed to worry an hour longer. He must go to sleep tonight with a light heart. They'd drive straight to the Mavrocordato house. The evening was still young, and it would be much better to see him there than at his place of business. It would add the informal, old-friends-as-we-are touch.

Within ten minutes they were speeding for the town, and an hour later were ringing Mr. Mavrocordato's doorbell.

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The door was opened by Anna. She explained that all the servants were out, having been allowed to go along to a circus; her uncle was confined to his room with a slight chill caught since the morning, but if their business were as urgent as they made it appear, he certainly would see them. She led the way upstairs.

Mr. Mavrocordato was in his bedroom, wrapped in a long, dark, Oriental dressing gown, wearing a skull cap and looking for once a real foreigner.

I think the talk about the money did not last very long. Mavrocordato was adamant. He would lend no further. And then he started to tell the young men about themselves, about the lives they were leading, their senseless extravagance, their selfishness, their uselessness, their ignorance. He declared how bitterly he now regretted that he had ever helped Forbes, not because he would probably lose his money, but because he had supplied material for his viciousness.

Anna laid her hand on her uncle's arm to restrain him, but he shook it off and then turned with particular fury on Chad, reminding him, in lashing words, of his decent parentage and the honourable name he bore. He declared that Chad's wealth and his ingeniousness in finding new forms of stupid pleasure had made him the ringleader of his set, and the young men's moral downfall would lie at Chad's door. Chad was quick tempered and drunk and there was truth enough in Mr. Mavrocordato's words to sting him to fury. He knocked the Greek down, so that he lay on the ground practically unconscious. Anna, of course, rushed forward to save him, but Newsom caught her in his arms; he had the large build of a Swede and it was easy for him to hold her.

I can see the room now alive with passions. The Greek, impotent bodily, but his brain still seething with his denunciation of the young man. Chad furious, but drunkenly satisfied by the blow he had just delivered; Forbes, bitter and miserable. Newsom had least cause to be enraged. He owed the Greek nothing, and the Greek's tirade had been directed principally against Chad; also, he was holding a very beautiful girl in his arms.

And now comes the lacuna, the thing Chad could never bring himself to speak of, never to write on paper. Only that excusing cry of: "We were drunk, we were very drunk." I do know that later Mr. Mavrocordato recovered sufficiently to stand up, to stand up taller than he had ever appeared before. He began to speak in an unknown tongue. The words did not appear to be his own words; he seemed to be reciting a formula, and he used strange gestures which seemed symbolic of something. Thus speaking he slowly approached the young men, who retreated across the room.

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"We couldn't speak; we couldn't take our eyes from his face. He looked terrible, as we went backwards. I stumbled over Anna's body." So Chad told me once.

Having pinned them in a corner of the room, the Greek finished his tirade with an outburst of particular malevolence and then collapsed into a chair. Chad was the first to recover, and asked insolently what all the rigmarole was about. In a few broken halting words the Greek told him that he had cursed the three of them, and that in a short time they would all be dead. That statement didn't impress them, and they laughingly staggered down the stairs to the hall door. Mavrocordato, crazed with grief and fury, followed them, cursing in English, but his words were almost incoherent. The young men fumbled at the lock of the door, and Mavrocordato had to fling them aside and throw it open himself. They stood on the top step outside the door and laughed at him, and Newsom said, "We'll call soon, old top. Looking forward to meeting Anna again."

The Greek was standing in the doorway, in the bright moonlight. He looked terrible, but he spoke very quietly, yet with tremendous intensity.

"When you touch that door, and touch it you will sooner or later, you will die within an hour, within a day, within a week."

That made them shout with laughter. Then, with a torrent of foul language, Newsom staggered forward and laid his hand on the door.

Suddenly everyone was silent. But nothing happened. Thinking back afterwards, Chad is of the opinion that Newsom paled, but the moonlight would make it difficult to be certain. They bundled into the car and drove off to Chad's house. The effect of the alcohol was beginning to wear off, and when I let them in they seemed to me to be strangely subdued.

I got them a drink and Chad asked me to stay with them. This surprised me a little, for I didn't generally make one of their party, but I imagine they wanted to escape talking about the evening's events. I stayed with them for an hour or so, and was longing to go to bed when suddenly Newsom screamed.

I remembered afterwards that Newsom had ceased to drink, and for half an hour had taken no part in the conversation. After he screamed, he fell from his chair to the floor and writhed there. His face was distorted with pain; he couldn't speak coherently, and was obviously suffering tortures. We tried to make him drink, but his teeth were clenched. I 'phoned Chad's doctor, and within an hour Newsom was in hospital and operated on immediately for appendicitis complicated by peritonitis. The operation was, of course, completely successful, but the patient died without recovering consciousness.

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Though I didn't know anything then about the earlier occurrence of the evening, it didn't surprise me that Chad should be terribly upset by Newsom's death. They had been companions since boyhood, had been to school and college together, and since they had both been sent down from the university for the same escapade, had been closer companions than ever. I sometimes wondered a little that Chad should find his company so congenial. Chad was thoughtless and foolish in many ways, but he had fine delicate qualities which Newsom's company stifled. Personally, I thought Newsom had little to recommend him except his handsome blustering animality.

A week after Newsom's death, Chad and Forbes left for Italy to visit Forbes' Italian relations. They planned to be away for six months or longer. Chad paid all expenses, and I had to transfer a large sum to Forbes' account—a thing I extremely disliked doing. Furthermore, the night before they left, Chad entrusted me with a mission to Mr. Mavrocordato. I was to go to him, he said, and ask him to surrender certain I.O.U.'s he held from Forbes. The latter was somewhat uncertain of the exact sum he owed; he was uncertain of what interest might have accrued, but the cheque Chad gave me should be amply sufficient; if by any chance it wasn't I had *carte blanche* to draw further on Chad's bank. At any cost the bills must be redeemed. It was hinted to me that the Greek, as well as returning the bills, might indicate that he withdrew some claim or threat hanging over Forbes. I couldn't understand exactly what was meant, but I understood that I was to note very carefully what the Greek said and report at once to Italy.

I didn't then connect Mr. Mavrocordato with Newsom and the flight to Italy. Still, I scented something a little sinister in the Forbes affair, not the less because Chad had bound me to the deepest secrecy, and I looked forward to my visit to the Greek with great interest and some apprehension.

I was not an important enough person ever to have been asked to his house, and I had met him only once, a few months before, in a friend's house. He had charmed and excited me by his personality and by his conversation, which was so full of strange knowledge and yet was never heavy, never donnish. He would accept some fact from you with eagerness, and you felt flattered that you had added to his knowledge, but when the subject under discussion was enlarged on, you discovered that your little fact was an elementary one well known to him, and that it was his exquisite politeness that had made him hear you out.

I sent up my card and he received me at once in his private office. At first I thought I was meeting his grey haired confidential clerk, for surely this shambling old man could not be the elegant,

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erect Mr. Mavrocordato I had met so recently. But it was he and he greeted me very civilly, speaking in a dull voice and turning on me a lifeless eye.

It was only when I began to speak of the business that had brought me that he began to come to life, but came to life in a dreadful, pitiable way. He seemed to shrink lower in his chair; he bent his head, and I noticed that his hair, which I had thought dark grey, was almost white; his hands trembled, and sometimes a shiver ran through his entire body. He heard me to the end without speaking, and then there was a long silence. He got up and stumbled to a safe at the other side of the room, unlocked it and took out a small bundle of papers.

"I give you my word of honour, Mr. Stevens," he said, "that these are all the papers I hold against that man." He tore them across, went to the fire and threw them on the coals. They blazed up. Then he went back to his chair.

"And the amount I owe you?" I asked.

"Nothing."

"You mean the debt is cancelled?"

"I am owed no money."

"Mr. Forbes wouldn't like that," I protested, "nor would Mr. Chadwick. I am betraying no confidence when I say that the debt, large as it is, is one which Mr. Chadwick can easily meet, and he is willing and anxious to meet it on behalf of his friend."

"I am owed no money," he repeated, and pressed a bell on the table.

Now I began to get frightened; the thing *was* sinister. I felt for Chad's sake—I didn't care a hang about Forbes—I must get the money accepted. I begged, I used every appeal I could think of. He answered not a word, and in the middle of my vain pleadings the valet appeared.

"Show the gentleman out, Charles. Good morning, Mr. Stevens."

I saw that further appeal was useless, but there was one thing left which I had to say.

"Mr. Mavrocordato," I said, "I knew nothing of this debt until two nights ago. Mr. Chadwick left for the Continent in his 'plane yesterday and gave me this commission to execute. As well as paying you, I was to ascertain whether you had any message, anything to say about—I declare I do not know what it might be about—but I was particularly to try to find out from you something, perhaps some assurance of goodwill—it sounded like that. You will probably understand. Is there—can you—can I?" I stumbled on.

He came to my rescue and silenced me by a gesture of his hand.

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" I completely understand what Mr. Chadwick was referring to, and there is no message."

There was nothing for me to do now but to withdraw.

I thought of wiring to Chad, but instead I wrote to him at once to Rome full particulars of the interview. I heard nothing from him for two weeks, and then to my surprise he cabled that he was leaving that day for home, that Forbes and his aunt were coming with him and that all would stay at Chad's house.

And now to keep the chain of events in order I quote a few extracts from Chad's diary:

October—

4*th*—Arrived Rome. Hoped for wire from Stevens, but nothing had come.

6*th*—Nothing yet. Damned anxious.

7*th*—Stevens' letter came. M. inexorable, blast him! Well, we're far away from him and his door—if there was anything in that craziness. Going to make a night of it with " Forby."

8*th*—Feel like hell. Passed a door last night just like old M's. Gave me a turn, spoiled the whole evening.

11*th*—"Forby" went off the handle last night—been drinking too much—maybe a touch of D.T.'s. His old aunt asked him to open the door to let her out of the room, and he started screaming that it was a plot to kill him.

12*th*—Hate Rome. Stay in all the time. Safer.

13*th*—Can't sleep at all. Feel that old devil is up to something. Wonder would any small bit of the door be effective. Suppose bit was sent by post to " Forby " or me and we opened it—? Rot. Of course the whole thing is rot, but suppose—

14*th*—Sure M. is up to some devilish trick. Wish I was on the spot to keep my eye on him, or try an interview with him, beg him to call it off. " Forby " is going to pieces, and I'm not so good, getting little or no sleep, and unable to eat because I get so sick. Not drinking at all.

15*th*—Start home tonight. Can't bear this anxiety. " Forby " comes too, but insists on bringing the old aunt; won't face his house alone. For the present we all go to my place; have wired Stevens.

I, of course, met them at the station. They had abandoned the 'plane in Rome because the aunt was not air-minded. She was older than I expected. She had married a Frenchman and was a widow. Her name was Madame Faure and she spoke very good English. Forbes was looking shocking, all shot to pieces, and went to bed at once and stayed there for three or four days, during which

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he pulled himself together, and when he got about again he seemed not too bad, but obviously very nervy. Chad was looking pale and thin, but I wouldn't have called him nervy; I would have called him very watchful, like a hunter stalking game, or rather—poor Chad—like an animal being stalked. He questioned me closely about Mavrocordato and I had to repeat several times every detail of my interview.

When Forbes was well enough, I made an appointment for them to visit the Greek in his office. When they got back they came into the library. I was working there, and I got up to leave them alone together.

"For God's sake, Stevens, don't sneak out of the room as if we were pariahs," said Chad and rang the bell.

He had never spoken to me in such a tone before, and for a moment I was tempted to give him as good as he gave and slam out of the room, but looking at his haggard face as he stood by the fire with his finger on the bell, I felt he needed all the sympathy and help I could give him, so I sat down again. He stood there pressing the bell till the butler appeared. He asked him to bring some brandy.

Chad had drunk nothing since he came home, but now he poured himself a stiff glass, and then another and another, talking disjointedly with Forbes all the time. I gathered that their interview with the Greek had been similar in its results to mine. Finally Chad's despair—for there had been despair in his face when he came in—evaporated, thanks to the brandy, and gave place to bravado.

He said to Forbes: "Who's afraid of him and his beastly door, anyway?"

Forbes mumbled something to the effect that he was.

"So'm I, but I mean that as long as we don't touch the bally thing we're as safe as houses. Just to show him how little we care, I'd love to walk down his street, cock a snook at his house and throw a stone at his door. Come along, 'Forby.'"

"Forby" wasn't for going at any price, but after a lot of talk from Chad he was persuaded to make the expedition, but only on condition that they kept on the opposite side of the street and that I went with them. Of course, at the time this sounded nonsense to me, but I thought neither of them was in a condition to perambulate the town unattended, and as my attempts to dissuade them were useless, the three of us set out.

It was a pleasant autumn afternoon, sunny and windy, with fallen leaves blowing about the streets. Five minutes brought us to the street where Mr. Mavrocordato lived. We walked down the

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street on the pavement opposite his house. Chad suddenly stopped us.

"Look!" he said, clutching Forbes' arm. "There are people on the doorstep."

"Why shouldn't there be?" said Forbes thickly. "What's the door to them?"

"I wonder what they're doing."

We walked on. There were four workmen on the step doing something to the door. We stopped opposite.

"Go across, Stevens, and see what they're up to."

I did so. The men were doing something to the door. I recognized one of them as the foreman carpenter in a firm that often did work for us. He recognized me and touched his hat. I asked him what job he was engaged on. I reported his answer to Chad; it appeared that Mr. Mavrocordato was having a new door fitted, though, as the foreman observed the old door had been a perfectly good Georgian door, too sound to be scrapped. My report was received in silence. Forbes was the first to speak.

"Well, it's gone, anyway, and that's that, and a good riddance and all that sort of thing, and now I say home again for a long drink."

But Chad was still silent. When he did speak it was in a strained, shrill voice.

"Where's the old one gone to?" he said.

Forbes stared at him.

"Don't you see, you fool? While it was there we knew at least where it was, could have burned the house—I thought of that today—but now—" He ran across the street to the men.

"What happened to the old door?" He almost shouted the question to the foreman.

The man stared at him, but replied civilly enough:

"Mr. Mavrocordato sold it this morning. I saw it carted away before we started to work on the new one."

"Carted away? Where to? By whom?"

"I couldn't say, sir. I didn't know the men who took it away. Odd thing for anyone to buy, though it was a good eighteenth century door, but there's a hundred like it in the town—even two hundred, I suppose."

Without a word Chad turned and started to walk home. He said nothing, but he seemed to be thinking deeply. Forbes appeared dazed, and I had to take his arm.

We went again to the library. Chad refused a drink.

"I must keep my head clear, and I want Stevens to come in on this. We need help, and you're not good for much, 'Forby.' Do you agree that I tell him as much as is necessary?"

Forbes agreed, and Chad told me just as much of the story as I have written down here.

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"You see," he concluded, "it's probably all poppycock, but it's dangerous poppycock, because it's got on our nerves. Forbes is going to drink himself to death, and I'll probably go off my nut. That door must be found and destroyed. That can't be so difficult. Go to every carpentry place in town—there aren't so many—and find out what firm has taken down a door today—an eighteenth century panelled hall door—and where they are erecting it. There are hundreds like them in the town; in fact, they may be on any friend's house. We'll drop into dinner one night, 'Forby,' you and I, to the Wilson's or the Penrose's or—" He broke off and started to laugh in a high, hysterical way. "I take my hat off to the old boy; it's a perfect revenge."

I started at once to make enquiries, and continued them for many weeks, but without any result. I think the building firms and carpenters in the town must have thought me crazy. I offered secret bribes to foremen and workmen, promising them large sums of money for information. I followed numberless false trails. So many people had "heard of" an old door being fitted somewhere or other.

I believe I became the most knowledgable man in England on the subject of doors. I was sent after Elizabethan doors, Queen Anne doors, Regency doors, as well, of course, as innumerable Georgian ones. I spent hours in the car scouring the country on false scents. I made discreet enquiries among Chad's friends and satisfied myself that the Penroses and the Wilsons and all the rest of them had made no alterations in their entrances. But by Christmas we had abandoned the hunt.

Forbes had gone back to his own house, where he lived with his aunt. Thanks to Chad, his affairs were now in order and he was able to live in an unextravagant way. He and Chad saw very little of each other. Forbes was being very sober and was going in for violent physical exercise. He started hockey again that winter and played a great deal of squash rackets. Whenever I saw him he looked very healthy, a little grave, perhaps; and I heard complaints from other young men that he was not the "sport" he used to be. Perhaps, poor fellow, he was trying to make his soul in the only way that his nature could.

Chad, on the other hand, hardly stirred out of the house, and spent most of his time in the library. He confessed that at first he did so from fear, but he soon stayed there because he found reading an occupation and a delight. I had known at Oxford that he had a good brain, and I had hated to see him throw his talents away in raffish company, but now we read together for hours, history mostly, and Elizabethan plays and poetry, and some Latin.

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" I am under sentence of death," he said to me once, " and how stupid to die ignorant of all this grand stuff."

He spoke very seldom of the Greek or of that terrible night. Sometimes, very late in the evening, his mind would return to it, and when he talked it was always of the Greek's appearance as he uttered the curse in the unknown tongue, and of his figure as he stood on the steps in the moonlight. After he had come back from Italy he had asked me for news of Anna, and I had made discreet enquiries. I found that no one had seen her, and that Mr. Mavrocordato, if asked about her, would mumble that she was travelling; and if asked where, would say vaguely, " Austria, I think." But if asked the same question the next day might answer " Russia," or " Egypt." After his one enquiry Chad never mentioned her name again. He grew very thin, and though he had never been rough in manner, he now became extraordinarily gentle and considerate, and though I had always liked him, he had now for me a charm I find hard to put into words.

Few people came to the house, but Chad loved the company of elderly Doctor Penrose and his daughter Beatrice—Bice, as they called her. In the old days Bice had shrunk from him for she was a gentle girl not likely to be attracted by his excesses, but the change in him changed her, and it was easy to see that they were falling in love with each other in a steady, satisfactory way.

On Christmas Eve, Madame Faure and Forbes were to dine with Chad, and we waited for them in the library. Madame Faure arrived first, explaining that her nephew had suddenly expressed a desire for a little walk and had left her on Chad's doorstep, promising to join us in ten minutes. We sipped our cocktails, and I remember that she and Chad talked about the siege of Paris in the Franco-German war. Her Italian father had been living in Paris. She was a very little girl then, but she had vivid memories of that war. She was most entertaining and the minutes slipped by.

Then Forbes appeared. He looked awfully queer, and Chad exactly expressed my opinion when he greeted him cheerily with:

" Well, ' Forby,' what's up ? You look like a whipped dog."

" Dog ? " repeated Forbes.

" Dog," he said again, taking his drink.

He spoke so strangely that I looked hard at him to see if he had been drinking, but he seemed perfectly sober and very quiet, and then I noticed that he had a handkerchief bound round his wrist.

" You've cut your wrist ? " I said.

" No—yes, I mean. Only a trifle."

I unwound the handkerchief, and there was a small, nasty looking wound with a drop of blood oozing from it. I took him

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to the bathroom and bathed it and put iodine on it. Then he told me.

Walking with his aunt to our house, he had suddenly felt an uncontrollable desire to take a stroll alone. His feet had turned, he didn't know why, towards Elm Street, which is one of the most completely Georgian streets in the town. He stopped at the corner of the street, and something dared him to touch every door in that street. He tried to shake the thing off, but it was no use. He said it seemed like a person talking to him, mocking him, calling him poltroon if he refused to accept the challenge. He felt he could never look himself in the face again, was branded for ever in his own eyes if he refused to accept, and he walked the whole length of the street touching every door, and back again on the opposite pavement doing the same thing. He had been afraid when he touched the first door. Then he gathered courage, and finally he touched them with bravado, with arrogance, with contempt.

He felt, he said, a different and a better man when he had finished with the street. He felt as if in some way he had justified himself to himself—and then a dog sprang at him. It was a big grey brute, and he hadn't noticed it till it sprang at his breast as if it wanted to fix its fangs in his throat. He beat the animal off with little difficulty and it disappeared howling in the darkness. As he walked on to Chad's, he noticed that his wrist was bleeding.

He begged me to say nothing to Chad, and we went back to the library and then to dinner. Everything went pleasantly enough until he threw the decanter of water into the fireplace.

I know that rabies is extinct in England. Nevertheless, within a week Forbes had died in all the horrors of hydrophobia.

Chad, strangely, seemed little moved by his death, except that some deeper sense of doom appeared to settle on him. I tried to cheer him by pointing out that we at least now knew the street in which the door was, even if we did not know the exact house, but he noted the fact without interest. Though still a charming companion—more charming than ever—he withdrew more and more into himself, possessed, I felt, of some mystical life which I could not penetrate. I implored him to sell up everything and go away, taking a new name if necessary, but he steadily refused.

"It would be no use," he said. "I shall have to face it anyhow, and why not here where I have my books and the garden and—?"

He stopped. I knew he meant Bice.

"Marry Miss Penrose," I urged. "Go away with her and be happy. You have suffered enough."

"I would never dare marry her."

I determined to make another appeal to Mr. Mavrocordato, and I sought him at his place of business. I was told he had gone

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abroad and would be away for many months. No, they were not permitted to supply his address, but any letter I wrote to him would be forwarded at once. I wrote letters, but got no reply.

Odd as it may appear, we spent a not unhappy spring. Chad never went outside his house and garden; he read more than ever, and even started to write small stories and essays. They were odd and fanciful, very delicate in subject and treatment, and were published later under another name with considerable *succès d'estime*. They showed what he might have done had things gone differently. But though we were fairly happy, there was always in my mind that "might have done, might have been." The house had faintly the air of a condemned cell. One was sitting at a death-bed.

And in that cell, beside that death-bed was Bice Penrose. She and her father—her mother was dead—were practically our only visitors. They came often. She would play her violin to Chad in the afternoons for hours and her father would join us for dinner. Both she and her father guessed something; very little, I think, but enough for them to ignore the town's conventions, and there was hardly a day that she did not spend hours alone in Chad's company. She loved him, she knew he loved her and that they could never marry.

I fancied that she might think that he had tied himself up in some misalliance and that that was the barrier between them, and I told her as delicately as possible that such was not the case, and I begged her, if she wished it, to marry him. It was not an easy thing to say to her, but she made it easy by saying that she understood perfectly. She was there for him to marry, but he had given her to understand that marriage was impossible, so she was there for everything else—for companionship, sympathy, love.

The end came one June evening. We had dined late in the garden. The doctor and Bice were there, and after dinner Bice and Chad had wandered down the garden towards the river while the doctor and I smoked at the dinner table.

It was almost midsummer, a cloudless sky, and when they started for home at eleven o'clock it was still quite light. Bice had come in from the garden with her arms full of crimson roses. "For poor old Francey," she explained to her father. "Chad would insist on cutting such masses; and won't she love them?" When we got into the hall she couldn't put on her wrap; she was afraid to put the roses down for fear she could never gather them tightly together again. Anyhow, the evening was very warm; she didn't need it; father would carry it.

But Chad volunteered instead. He would carry the little wrap; he would see her home; we would all go to the doctor's together.

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That was agreed to with the stipulation that the flowers should be left at " Francey's " on the way.

"And who," I enquired of the doctor, " is Francey ? "

The doctor had stopped to light his pipe, and while I stood with him, the others had turned the corner and were out of sight.

" An old governess of Bice's. Back in the town staying with some friends. Blast this pipe."

" Where is she staying ? "

" Some house in Elm Street. I don't know the number."

I caught his arm.

" Don't mind the pipe ; let's go after them, sir." I almost pulled him along the pavement.

" Don't see what the hurry is," the doctor grumbled.

But I rushed him along, leaving him behind in the end, and was close behind Chad when I heard Bice say :

" This is the door, Chad, dear."

She stood there, her hands full of crimson roses, and he went up the one shallow step that separated the door from the pavement. He looked at her, and he looked at me standing just behind her. I could only just articulate the one warning word, " Chad ! "—but he made some little negative motion that made any further interference impossible.

He looked at Bice very tenderly and said gently :

" You are certain this is the door—the right door ? "

" Yes, that is the right door ; just press the bell."

He looked at her again, and looked at the lovely night sky, at the gracious, peaceful street ; looked, as it were, for the last time on everything lovely in life, and then he touched the door.

Thank goodness, nothing horrible happened. He just sank gently down, turning as he reached the ground so that his dying eyes could look at hers. In an instant she was on her knees beside him, the crimson roses all scattered on his breast.

I enquired about that door later. It had certainly not been renewed within the last twenty years. In all probability it had been there since the house had been built.

* * *

NO JOKING

A member of a London Chamber of Commerce telephoned the Board of Trade, and asked : " Do I need a licence to import frozen poultry ? "

Said the voice at the other end : "Alive or dead ? "

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ANYONE ELSE BUT YOU

**Feudin'—or marryin'—at the point of a gun?
It seemed the only way they knew**

by NEILL C. WILSON

TRUDGING through the January dusk, Hub Trevitt could have been more observant. But he was tired and hungry. And a long time had gone by since a Hardee and a Trevitt had pumped lead at each other.

He pulled a mink trap, found it sprung and robbed by its sly quarry, reset it, scattered fresh grouse feathers and fish oil about the stump, and moved on. He looked at his muskrat barrel artfully planted in an ice hole. The slit paper head was still strewn with leaves and snow. Mr. Muskrat, though a clumsy fellow, hadn't yet nosed the carrot bait.

Hub trudged on, longing to get his supper fire started. Then he stopped short. Wild honeysuckle vines had been dragged down from some oaks. The long strands, winter-tough and leafless, lay in a tangled ball. What on earth would do that?

Behind the trees the hard snow and frozen mud were churned, and a square hole yawned. Hub recalled with a start. That was the hidden site of an old pit trap, log walled and deep enough to hold an elk or a bear—game long cleared from this region.

The trapper was a big, deliberate young man. He unslung the load of pelts from his back. His grandfather, Bashan Trevitt, or even Bashan's father, had built that deadfall. Its top could be rotten. A man could take a spill and land in pretty bad trouble.

Peering in, he couldn't see much. He took hold of an overhanging bough and lowered his head and shoulders, but drew back with a hunter's quickness. What was down there wore pants and a shirt.

Then it could be a Hardee.

The Hardee trap line ran on the other side of Peckerwood Mountain. The summit ridge was the dividing line, and a solemn one it was, after decades of shot swapping.

The thought of that strife starting up again made Hub's hair roots prickle. Senseless warfare it had been, filled with sudden snatching and grabbing, and sometimes pitching into the reddened dirt. In recent years there had been an uneasy truce. But if a

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Hardee, now, had rashly crossed the summit, fooling with Trevitt traps—

"Come out!" ordered Hub.

The shape didn't stir and didn't speak.

Well, then, he'd pull it out. He tested the opening and swung in, landing catlike. He warned in language a Hardee would understand, "No tricks or I'll stick a knife in you."

He made out in the murk that the figure was seated on the ground against the cold wall. Why, it wasn't more than a boy, a puny, measly boy. He grasped the shirt. There was a gasp. He tried to pull the form to its feet, but it didn't come. A stone-weighted timber had fallen, pinning it. He dragged the mouldy beam away, caught the figure under the arms and started to pull. His hands dropped as if they'd grabbed knives.

"Oh." It took him an instant to recover. "Why didn't you tell me?"

Still no word. No whimper.

He raised his voice, "Are you hurt?"

He'd have to get her up into the waning daylight to find out. He grasped her again—firmly this time—and tossed her up through the opening, pulling himself up after. He carried her to the heaped honeysuckle, felt for broken bones. A knee was swollen and hot beneath its outsize pants leg.

He called loudly, for she remained stubbornly mute, "It's only a bad bang and a wrench! Can you hear me?"

Whatever tied her tongue—fright or shock, cussedness or shame—dumb she remained. But he couldn't leave her here. He swung her to his shoulder like a dressed deer, caught up his pack with his free hand and plunged onwards.

It was a mile to Hub's cabin; the third year he'd wintered there alone. He pushed in and dumped her on the edge of his rough bed. Then he lit the lantern and held it to her face. She was young, pale, scrawny; but angry and defiant. She was at bay and knew it. He'd seen that look in the eyes of hundreds of trapped forest creatures. Her features were a Hardee's, he was sure of it. Her clothing was a jumble of men's stuff, all of it too big for her. Jim, Obe and Hake Hardee could have worn it, and probably had, long and hard, before passing it on to their sister. Her hair was sticky with mud, and she looked frightened as she sat waiting, eyes wary, hands tensed on the edge of the bed.

She must have been raised on tales of the devil horned Trevitts. So she knew that in brushes between Hardees and Trevitts, the Trevitts always came out best. The more fool she, thought Hub, for prodding and prying unbidden on this side of the mountain.

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The more blockhead, for not watching where she stepped. It wouldn't be so bad if he hadn't found her in the hole and been forced to bring her here.

Temper gripped him. "You crossed the ridge. You messed about with my traps. You knew that sneaking and prying on this side of Peckerwood could start a heap of trouble." If her family got the wrong idea, it could start all over again; the generations-old warfare that had filled four graves and made several Hardees and two Trevitts crippled for life. "I ought to give every inch of you a thumping."

Sweat broke out on her clay streaked forehead. In a cold cabin too.

He remembered that she was hurt.

"All right," he said, less roughly. He began to feel sorry for this ragtag bundle with the taut muscles and the smeared face. "Get it in your head I'm not going to whip you. Or do like Grandfather Trevitt did with Orilla Hubbard."

No Trevitt, and no Hardee, ever forgot what had started the families to warring. Bashan Trevitt had scooped the bridal-wreathed Orilla up and slung her across his saddle just as the preacher was about to tie her for life to Claghorne Hardee.

Orilla was thumped down so hard that the horse made twenty bounds before she could reach Bash with a good telling punch, and all he'd done for the blow was kiss her ringless fingers and laugh. By the time the Hardees had realized what was happening, Bash had gained Big Piney ferry and pulled himself and Orilla across and cut the rope. Orilla had mothered and grandmothered and tonicked and dosed forty six Trevitts after that, each new Trevitt thinking up taunts that kept Hardees grabbing rifles. Until the uneasy peace of the present, now risked all over again by this silly poacher.

He shook the stove down and quickly got a fire roaring. "Now we'll see to that knee."

She tried to draw back. Her fists knotted.

He covered them with a big paw. "Let's be friends till I begin pouring down the medicine." He tucked her sinewy fists under her, knelt, and pushed the thick pants leg up.

"We'll have to skin these breeches off. Poke your shirt tail around you and git most of you under cover."

She struggled a little, but he whipped a blanket round her and briskly gained the victory. He threw the dragged off garment to the foot of the bed.

He worked the bared knee gently. She sat there, leaning back on her hands, her face white with fury and torment.

"No, there's nothing broke. I'll pack it with snow. Here,

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wash your face; it'll freshen you up." He handed her a damp rag. She flung it at him. He put his powerful hand behind her head and wiped her face, half expecting her to bite.

Orilla Hubbard had probably fought like this when she was stolen, but she'd been about a year older, pretty as a rainbow according to stories, and doubly pretty because she was all rigged out for her wedding day. This girl's muddy nose was no fine feature like Granny Orilla's, but a dished-up snub. Her eyes burned hotly.

He still couldn't make out whether she was deaf and dumb or only mulish. But a woman who could hold her tongue like that deserved respect. He fetched a pan of snow, packed her knee in it, and then said, for he guessed she was hungry, "Time for you and me to eat."

He tended the stove. The air grew pungent. "Deer liver 'n' onions." Other smells took hold, some pleasant, some hateful. Elm-bark tea with yellowroot, pepper, gizzard lining, nine drops of kerosene, and three of asafoetida. "We call it Granny Orilla's Body and Spirit Mender. It was her standby for chills, rheumatics, fever, tired bones and peevishness. Always cured Grandfather Bashan of anything he had, except fishing notions during corn-hoeing. If Clag Hardee had hung on to Orilla as a good man should, 'stead of trading her for hoof gravel in the face, you Hardees would have been raised on Orilla's Mender and you'd have amounted to something. Open your mouth, even if you never use it to say anything."

She shrank back. Her teeth clenched. "Open!" When she wouldn't, he pried her jaws apart with fingers that had been trained on steel traps, and poured. She got away from the cup finally, knocking it flying.

He grinned. "You'll pull through. You can scrap like a badger tailed to a spring pole. Now we'll have supper." He kicked a stool to the bedside and placed a filled plate on it. He stood away, eating from the pan.

For a time she stayed sullen and ignored the dish. But the whiffs from it were too much. She looked at him with eyes that could kill, but she nibbled. He paid no attention to this sign of one more Trevitt victory. She surrendered completely then and gobbled. She stowed with relish.

Colour came to her cheeks. He put his emptied pan aside and tossed her a comb. "You still look like something that's been up a tree all night. You'd better tidy that fuzz." He turned his back and washed the dishes. When he glanced her way again, she'd pulled the clay lumps from the tousle. Her hair was long and bright.

"Now listen." He'd grown used to the one-way conversation.

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He didn't expect an answer. "This is going to be a cold night outside, and the footing will be slicker'n goose grease. If you try to go home you'll probably fall and really wreck that knee. Or stick a leg into a fox trap. Getting you home calls for a sledge, and daylight for me to make one. So you'll have to stay here overnight."

The girl viewed him levelly, not moving. Though perhaps she couldn't hear him; couldn't understand.

He continued, "There's only one bed to this place. You're in it."

Her eyes didn't blink.

"So," he finished, "you git the cabin. I'm sleeping out."

He stoked the stove. Then he spread her breeches to dry, and flipped the top blanket out from under her arms. "You can make do without this one." Hub caught up the lantern, and went forth.

The cold whistled round him, but Hub was used to winter weather on this high slope. His twenty years of life had known hardy schooling. If the night had been blowy he'd have built a brush shelter. In that still air, he needed only a fire a few feet from a tall rock. Wrapped in the single blanket, he lay down between rock and fire and watched the dance of the sparks.

Twice he woke and built up his blaze, and stole in and kept up the fire in the cabin stove. By its red flicker, the girl's hair was shiny on his balsam-needle pillow. She looked more child than woman, sleeping calm like that, her face no longer frightened, angry or pain twisted. Given a soaping up and a ribbon to her hair, she could be quite pretty, he decided. Pretty as a brass jacketed bullet. He put the thought away, not liking it.

In the morning he stamped along to the cabin, whistling and thumping his boot toes to the doorstep. He called out to the closed door, not wanting to take her by surprise. He butted it open with an armful of firewood.

Save for rumpled bed and still glowing stove, the hut was empty.

"Hey!" shouted Hub Trevitt.

She was gone.

Perhaps only a little way. Perhaps she'd fallen neck-deep into new trouble. He studied the snow. Though flint hard, it showed scratches where she'd made for the ridge. He strode after, fearing to find her lying somewhere in the aching dawn cold. But the scratches led up and over the summit, and down the other side. That bandaged knee had stood up mighty well . . . or fear of another cup of his granny's tonic had fitted her with wings.

Yonder was Hardee territory, unsound ground for a Trevitt.

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But Hub followed the marks on down anyhow. Seven miles he followed, to the edge of a clearing. A battered house stood on its far side, with smoke rising straight and thin from a stick-and-clay chimney. Figures could be seen. That would be burly Hake, dragging a bale of fodder as lightly as a poke of feathers. That would be Jim, laying open a two-foot chunk of firewood with an axe blow. Gristle-hard Obe and stringy Pa Hardee moved between house and sheds.

Hub Trevitt should have turned. But there was no concealing his tracks. Obe, Jim or Hake Hardee or their leathery old man would find them and buzz over them like hornets, and read the girl's there, too, even if she'd crept into the house unnoticed. Hub had his winter work to tend to and was not minded to spend a season dodging shots, and perhaps not always dodging them. He'd go straight to the house and tell the Hardees the facts.

He stepped out into the open meadow and yelled. The four figures looked up, startled, then dived for cover. With the shyness of folk not given to neighbouring, they simply vanished.

Empty hands in plain view, Hub crossed the clearing and mounted the sagging front step and rapped. It was the first call of a Trevitt to the Hardee homestead since Grandfather Bash Trevitt cracked those wedding guest heads together and scooped up Clag Hardee's woman.

He thumped again. Silence reigned, but after a spell the door opened a hand span.

Pa Hardee's eyes were ice blue, his cheeks were caved, his moustache broken-winged, his expression bleak. He'd been pinked once in a swap of bullets and his left arm wasn't much use.

" I take it you know me. I'm Hubbard Trevitt." Hub's voice sounded brittle to his own ears.

Pa Hardee stood stockstill.

Said Hub, " I'm sorry Trevitts and Hardees haven't always got along together. I don't aim to stir the feudin' up again. My business is plain trapping."

He wished the head of the Hardee tribe would say something. Were the girl's three brothers closing in behind him?

He tried again, " I don't ask we should like each other. But just that we should stop grudging one another."

The old man, peering through the slit with his right hand out of sight, found voice. The words whipped like buckshot, " I've been thinking to look you up, soon as chores git done. What's this tale my girl's telling? "

So she does know how to talk, thought Hub. Wonder what kind of a tale she made of it?

He stated bluntly, " I found her in my pit trap. I don't know

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what brought her there; you should keep your kin closer to home. But I want you to know I laid no hand on her that wasn't duty, including the mite of tonic. She was hurt, and I did what I could for her. I gave her my bed and slept out."

The gaunt face tightened. The eyes didn't shift. "Kedron!"

Kedron, thought Hub. So that's her name.

The floor creaked. The door crack widened. She stood beside her father, a slight figure in a loose skimpy dress, her face colourless and without expression, her pale hair down her back. He marvelled that he'd ever thought her pretty. She looked through Hub and past him, as if he were made of glass.

Pa produced his big rifle. "Do you want he should marry you?"

"No!"

Hub jumped as if gaffed. Marry? Nothing had been further from his head.

"You want I should nail him, skin and hair, to the barn?"

"He's nothing to me." Her voice was toneless. Her eyes still looked through him without seeing.

"He says he didn't do you scratch nor folly. Is that Bible truth?"

"It's truth."

"Git!" said Pa Hardee to Hub Trevitt.

Hub turned and left. No one else was in sight, but he sensed with every nerve end that muscular Obe, Hake and Jim were watching hungrily. If they wanted to drill him or jump him, now was their chance. If they didn't now, the truce would probably endure on the mountain. Though why their sister had crossed the dead line was a puzzle.

Hub marched across the clearing and made his way up the long slope. Not even a playful bucket of birdshot sang after him. He was glad he'd called, glad he'd faced the issue. It could have come out worse. He was sorry, though, that the Hardees refused to forget old scores. A Hardee getting caught in a Trevitt bear trap hadn't shortened the list of Hardees made to look ridiculous. Though that one had almost nailed him too. He found himself thinking, her Pa put it up to her, did she want me to marry her. Gee, what an idea.

He scaled the slope a trifle faster, and darted over the crest as if a whole tribe of Hardee women were after him, pale haired, scrawny, each wrapped in a single rag.

For the next few weeks Hub Trevitt tramped his solitary way, spreading a trapper's table for the wild things: clover honey, frogs' eggs and skunk scent for the wily red fox; apple as well as

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carrot for the muskrat. He set drag poles for the bobcat, boiled and smoked his traps, or bound them against human taint with aromatic hemlock withe. When gale slanted down, he stretched peltries in the cabin. He had wood, grub, tobacco, and his own company, which had always been good. And a job to do. What more could a man ask?

Towards the end of January he noticed a change in himself, but it was a mood that came with the prolonged storms. Muscles grew cramped from being cabin-bound. Tobacco became tasteless. Well, the hut had been used by a long line of wintering Trevitts, and was stocked for idle hours.

Hub took down some seasoned hickory that lay across the rafters. He whittled a set of chair rounds, and back slats, too. From a chunk of white oak he rived out thin, strong splints and wove them to a seat frame. Down at the home place in Cat Track Hollow there were more little straight-backed chairs like this than Trevitts to use them.

When a spell of false warmth brought sap up into the maple trees, Hub took moments from his trap tending to cut posts from a two inch limb. He lopped them to a short pair and a long, and gave the long pair a bending, so as to ease the sitter's back.

Soon after, when winter came down again, Hub had his chair made, and even Uncle Tate, who was a master, would have approved the handiwork.

But the false spring had done something to Hub, as it had to the sugar trees. It left him grim and restless. He scowled at the chair he'd finished. He put it in one corner and then in another, and kicked it aside, dissatisfied. Finally he climbed up and fished around in the rafters for two light slabs of walnut, fine and straight grained. What was yeasting in his mind had never been there before, and it angered him, but he decided to give way to it.

This was hard whittling, for the slabs were dry and tough with age. But they began to take shape. When out on his trap line he pushed them from his mind, but at evening he lifted the pile of skins where he kept them hid, brought them forth, and fell to shaving and scraping. They became slender, pointed, curved. Their dainty ounces of grey-brown wood grew sleek as mink's fur under his rubbing.

Every chairmaker knows that hickory, oak or maple will creep all over a puncheon floor. But walnut won't creep, and that makes it the only wood suitable for runners on a rocking chair. Yet what, in this trapper's hut, did a six foot two solitary male want of a chair that rocked? Might as well sit in a lady's lap. Oh, well, soon as winter was done he'd take it to the Holler and give it to Granny Hite or Levicy Vasey or one of the old-maid Cornetts.

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Yet to a womanless man it was a comfort just to spy that little chair when he came home from his long tramps. Seemed as though it nodded when he touched it. He'd purely given it graceful balance . . .

On one particular evening in late March, Hub came in, and halted. The little chair was drawn up with its toes pointed towards the stove. That's how he'd left it, the chair being too big for hiding. But it wore a knowing air. As if it could tell something. And indeed it could. On one side of it was a basket.

Hub snatched up the basket. It was crammed to the top with puccoon roots, madder plants, alder roots—dyes, every one, for pretty baskets such as this. He dashed out, ran for the thicket that hid the bear pit. This time the trap hadn't been disturbed. But that tangled ball of ripped-down honeysuckle vines had been gathered up and lugged away towards the ridge. He followed while it was still light. It was an easy trail, marked by the chaff and litter of the vines.

Honeysuckle strands are fine for baskets, and on this side of Peckerwood they grew twenty five feet long. On the other side, like everywhere else, they grew scrubby and knotty. So basket vines were what had brought Kedron poaching last January; he saw it now. That's what had caused her to tumble into the pit. And she'd wanted those vines badly enough to steal back for them.

But she needn't have poked into his cabin. She must have peeped first, and spied the chair. Had it roused her laughter? Had she crazily judged him lonesome? Couldn't she tell he'd made it for one of the Cornetts, or for Levicy Vasey, who was his great-aunt, or for putting up for sale at Toler's store? By what right had she dared to sneak in and try it for size? And drawn up his little stool beside it?

Rage took Hub for this piece of Hardee mockery. He ran back to the cabin, snatched up the dainty chair, bore it outside, whirled it high. Broke it across his chopping block. Brought the axe down on it, blade and head. Smashed it to bits not much bigger than the chaff of the honeysuckle.

And then stalked in and cooked supper. He realized it was time he was getting down from this mountain.

Skins of woodland creatures were beginning to turn red, anyhow, and fur yellow—sign that the trapping season was near its end. In the morning he'd start out for the Holler.

But with morning, a sagging in the legs struck him. A do-nothing mood buckled his knees. It made him want to sit all day on his doorstep, letting the sun soak in. It kept him there watching

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the butterflies caper and cut like painted leaves on the soft air; watching squirrels spin about the tree trunks and pounce and grapple in a whirling blur.

Hub decided that what he needed was a bowl of Granny Orilla Trevitt's tonic tea, and he shambled in and brewed some, though the smell of the stuff forced his head aside, and even by holding his nose he couldn't swallow it. No wonder Kedron had fought like a wildcat when he poured the mixture into her. The memory of her fists and flailing elbows stirred a tingle. He discovered with a surge that Orilla's fearful toddy wasn't what he wanted. What he longed for was a wrestle, a fight. A grip and tug of bodies, equal matched and angry. Obe Hardee's big carcass would be just the thing, or the rawboned strength of Jim Hardee, or the crouch and cunning and lynx-quick pouncing of Hake. After a man's been cabinned up with himself for a winter, he needs a rumpus, and those were three men of violence and sound, lasting hatred who'd give it. He'd pull his traps and set out for the home farm tomorrow. Today he was pining and panting for a fight.

He made off up the slope, through the pinewoods, to the knobs and balds and wide sky of Peckerwood and down the Hardee side. He felt good. He felt great. He'd grab those lunkish frames, he'd bend and sway and cave them, and crunch and hurl them, one by one, or three to the bunch, and Pa Hardee, too, if the old 'un didn't get out like a scared goat. It was time these fish-mouthed Hardees got their final chance. He'd show them a Trevitt was master still. Hub felt the leap and churn of power. He laughed. He shouted. He thrust down through the sand myrtle and button-bush, trampling bluebell and violet, and hollering for pure joy, rolling a song, bellowing his purpose.

Everything was quick with life. Everything was out of its hole, out of its log, pod, shell, stump and burrow, seeking battle, seeking frolic, sniffing the spring.

There it was across the clearing, the Hardee homestead. "I'm a-coming!" Hub filled the cove with whoops, filling meadow and woods with taunts and dares, for that was the surest way of discouraging a bullet, of bringing the brothers out with only their brawn and fury. "I'll heave Obe Hardee into a well spring and Hake into a manure pile! I'll hang Jim on a fence! I'll make you think Bash Trevitt himself's passed by again!"

He crossed the clearing, flung a heavy stone at the door. Nobody appeared. Weren't they at home? He clomped about. That's when he saw the float of a skirt. It whipped behind the barn.

Hub took after it, and, like the squirrels that launch themselves around tree trunks, round the barn he went full tilt. Tripping twice, sprawling once—these Hardees left tools scattered wide and

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careless. Since he couldn't find a fight, he'd settle for a foot race. The fluttering cloth made across the cow pasture, skimmed a fence. He followed with man-size strides. In the woods it vanished. He tracked it by twigs that swayed, by leaves that shook. He knew he was gaining. He'd wanted Obe, Jim, Hake. But since they'd fled, and Pa, too, he'd deal with nimble Kedron. He'd rattle her till she yelled. He'd make her tell what she'd been up to, snooping in his cabin, moving his stool, leaving her gear like that. There she was, darting between the sycamores, over the hummocks.

But he could cross hummocks, too. He had her now. He reached for that flying skirt.

The crash took the breath right out of him. He floundered and tore at the sharp fanged thing. But it was round his hips with a hug of fire. It was a hickory hoop with curved nails in it. He was in a barrel. A stone weighted muskrat barrel. He and the barrel went over. Shoulders and head under muddy water, he struggled, but couldn't get a footing. His feet were caged in the barrel, his knees and thighs locked in it.

Shove as he would, his arms went down into the ooze. Something righted him, brought his head up into sunlight—and it was about time. He'd swallowed a lake. He heard shrieks of laughter.

He couldn't get out, for the least lunge would send the barrel over again. He gawked through the mud and slime that glued his face. There she perched on her hummock, doubled over in glee, elbows propped on knees, pale hair swinging. She mocked. She hooted. Nothing pallid about those young cheeks now. They glowed. They shone.

"Chop me out. Get an axe!" pleaded Hub.

She laughed, choked, gasped, laughed some more, until she simply ran out of breath, and grew weak from screaming that a Hardee had caught a Trevitt hard and fast in a barrel trap. But she kept him there, and told him things that a Trevitt had never thought to hear from a Hardee—things that she seemed to think were good for him. Of how uppity the Trevitts always had been, because their side of the mountain had better soil and weather. And better game trails, too, and they'd been very selfish with them, which had helped to keep the Hardees poor and badly shod and armed. And badly mannered, too; but what could you expect of folks on land so mean it sprouted only building rock—which her men were away with now, hauling to town on a stoneboat.

Her last January fall into that Trevitt pit trap had been simply one more Trevitt win and Hardee loss, but now the score was more even. A Hardee had speared and caught a Trevitt like a bullfrog flapping in a blue crane's beak, and if he'd admit it, she'd help him. Otherwise he could fight the barrel. She had work elsewhere.

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The nails bit into Hub. He couldn't kick loose or climb out, and he'd peeled the skins from too many creatures to want to tear his own. He was beaten. He hollered that he'd come to do battle with her kinfolk, but had found only her, Kedron, and she'd whipped him.

"Say that again."

He said it again.

"I'll go and fetch the axe," said Kedron.

She soon returned with the axe. Balancing on a tussock, she split him out neatly. Staves and hoops fell away from his well raked hips.

The hollers had gone out of him, and the urge and hanker for combat. He said, "Well, I'll be going back up the mountain."

The hollers had gone out of her, too. "Reckon you will."

Something held him to the spot, and it wasn't the ooze of the tussock. It was the newness of the situation, and one special oddity of it. He said, wondering greatly, "First time a Trevitt was ever really whipped by a Hardee. Funny thing is, I don't mind it."

"I bet you sting from the nails," said Kedron. "I'm sorry."

He looked closely at her. She meant it. She wasn't laughing. And she was pretty, though muddy and bedraggled as usual, but with a new light dancing about her. You'd have to go to a pansy patch or a sunset or a flight of Canadian geese to find anything half so pretty, and even then there'd be something missing—something that she had.

A great big idea came to Hub. Maybe it had been there all along, so big that he hadn't seen it. He wanted to tell her about it. His tongue stuck like a pair of feet in a barrel.

He yanked at the wedged tongue and blurted, "I've been making a rocking chair."

She was still.

"Guess you saw that chair."

Hushed and frozen-like, she waited.

"Well, I busted it."

Her mouth and eyes stood open, but she didn't speak.

Couldn't she see he wanted to tell her he'd make another rocking chair, prettier by far, but that his stool and her basket must always stay beside it? Wasn't she going to help at all? He grabbed her. "Kedron!"

Her neck smelled good. Her hair, mud and all, smelled clean and fresh as golden rod. They clung to each other as the hummock broke under them. They laughed, for this plunge made fine clinging.

"Kedron! When can I talk to your Pa and fight your brothers?"

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She pulled away. "I hear them now."

"I wish I was still hotted up for them, 'stead of—um—all gentled down and softlike. I'm not at my best."

Kedron smiled. "They'll beat you, silly, but it won't take long." And cheerfully, "I'll start making a batch of Orilla's Mender at once. Might as well work my hand in."

* * *

THE TORTOISE AND THE HARE

There was once a wise young tortoise who read in an ancient book about a tortoise who had beaten a hare in a race. He read all the other books he could find but in none of them was there any record of a hare who had beaten a tortoise. The wise young tortoise came to the natural conclusion that he could outrun a hare, so he set forth in search of one.

In his wanderings he met many animals who were willing to race him; weasels, stoats, dachshunds, badger-boars, short-tailed field mice and ground squirrels. But when the tortoise asked if they could outrun a hare, they all said no, they couldn't (with the exception of a dachshund named Freddy, and nobody paid any attention to him). "Well, I can," said the tortoise, "so there's no use wasting my time on you." And he continued his search.

After many days, the tortoise finally encountered a hare and challenged him to a race.

"What are you going to use for legs?" asked the hare.

"Never mind that," said the tortoise. "Read this." He showed the hare the story in the ancient book, complete with moral about the swift not always being so terribly fast.

"Tosh," said the hare. "You couldn't go fifty feet in an hour and a half, whereas I can go fifty feet in one and a fifth seconds."

"Posh," said the tortoise. "You probably won't even finish second."

"We'll see about that," said the hare.

So they marked off a course fifty feet long. All the other animals gathered around. A bull-frog set them on their marks, a gun dog fired a pistol, and they were off.

When the hare crossed the finish line, the tortoise had gone approximately eight and three-quarter inches.

Moral: *A new broom may sweep clean, but never trust an old saw.*

JAMES THURBER

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NIGHT AND DAY

IN the dead middle of night,
Quiet and cold,
I heard the screwk of Chantecleer:
Three times he called.
It was an angry signature
Upon the silence scrawled.

Thrice at the frozen hour
He cried his crow,
Waking from dreams of what he was
Millenniums ago,
When, in forests of India,
Under a royal sun,
He with his wives, many and meek,
Lived like Solomon.

Some vestiges remain
Of dreams so deep:
Round his insulted heart
Sick humours creep:
And with his crooked crow he signs
The death-warrant of sleep.

GERALD BULLETT

GLORY is of the sun, too, and the sun of suns,
and down the shafts of his splendid pinions
run tiny rivers of peace.

Most of his time, the tiger pads
and slouches in a burning peace;
And the small hawk high up turns round
on the slow pivot of peace.
Peace comes from behind the sun,
with the peregrine falcon, and the owl.

D. H. LAWRENCE, 1885-1930

THE moon on the one hand, the dawn on the other:
The moon is my sister, the dawn is my brother.

HILAIRE BELLOC

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NEVER TAKE NO FOR AN ANSWER

A single sprig of wheat, a starry primrose, and one downy feather from a meadow bird—these were but part of the miracle

by PAUL GALLICO

APPROACHING Assisi via the chalky, dusty road that twists its way up Monte Subasio, now revealing, now concealing the exquisite little town as it winds its way through olive and cypress groves, you eventually reach a division where your choice lies between an upper and a lower route.

If you select the latter, you soon find yourself entering Assisi through the twelfth century archway of the denticulated door of St. Francis. But if, seduced by the clear air, the wish to mount even closer to the canopy of blue Italian sky and expose still more of the delectable view of the rich Umbrian valley below, you choose the upper way, you and your vehicle eventually become inextricably entangled in the welter of humanity, oxen, goats, bawling calves, mules, fowl, children, pigs, booths and carts gathered at the market place outside the walls.

It is here you would be most likely to encounter Pepino, with his donkey Violetta, hard at work, turning his hand to anything whereby a small boy and a strong, willing beast of burden could win for themselves the crumpled ten and twenty lira notes needed to buy food and pay for lodging in the barn of Niccolo the stableman.

Pepino and Violetta were everything to each other. They were a familiar sight about Assisi and its immediate environs—the thin brown boy, ragged and barefooted, with the enormous dark eyes, large ears, and close cropped, upstanding hair, and the dust coloured little donkey with the Mona Lisa smile.

Pepino was ten years old and an orphan, his father, mother and near relatives having been killed in the war. In self reliance, wisdom and demeanour he was, of course, much older, a circumstance aided by his independence, for Pepino was an unusual orphan in that having a heritage he need rely on no one. Pepino's heritage was Violetta.

She was a good and useful and docile donkey, alike as any other with friendly, gentle eyes, soft taupe coloured muzzle, and long, pointed brown ears, with one exception that distinguished her.

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Violetta had a curious expression about the corners of her mouth, as though she were smiling gently over something that amused or pleased her. Thus, no matter what kind of, or how much work she was asked to do, she always appeared to be performing it with a smile of quiet satisfaction. The combination of Pepino's dark lustrous eyes and Violetta's smile was so harmonious that people favoured them and they were able not only to earn enough for their keep, but, aided and advised by Father Damico, the priest of their parish, to save a little as well.

There were all kinds of things they could do—carry loads of wood or water, deliver purchases carried in the panniers that thumped against Violetta's sides, hire out to help pull a cart mired in the mud, aid in the olive harvest, and even, occasionally, help some citizen who was too encumbered with wine to reach his home on foot, by means of a four footed taxi with Pepino walking beside to see that the drunkard did not fall off.

But this was not the only reason for the love that existed between boy and donkey, for Violetta was more than just the means of his livelihood. She was mother to him, and father, brother, playmate, companion, and comfort. At night, in the straw of Niccolo's stable, Pepino slept curled up close to her when it was cold, his head pillowed on her neck.

Since the mountainside was a rough world for a small boy, he was sometimes beaten or injured, and then he could creep to her for comfort and Violetta would gently nuzzle his bruises. When there was joy in his heart, he shouted songs into her waving ears; when he was lonely and hurt, he could lean his head against her soft, warm flank and cry out his tears.

On his part, he fed her, watered her, searched her for ticks and parasites, picked stones from her hoofs, scratched and groomed and curried her, lavished affection on her, particularly when they were alone, while in public he never beat her with the donkey stick more than was necessary. For this treatment Violetta made a god of Pepino, and repaid him with loyalty, obedience and affection.

Thus, when one day in the early spring Violetta fell ill, it was the most serious thing that had ever happened to Pepino. It began first with an unusual lethargy that would respond neither to stick nor caresses, nor the young, strident voice urging her on. Later Pepino observed other symptoms and a visible loss of weight. Her ribs, once so well padded, began to show through her sides. But most distressing, either through a change in the conformation of her head, due to growing thinner, or because of the distress of the illness, Violetta lost her enchanting and lovable smile.

Drawing upon his carefully hoarded reserves of lira notes and

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parting with several of the impressive denomination of a hundred, Pepino called in Dr. Bartoli, the vet.

The vet. examined her in good faith, dosed her, and tried his best; but she did not improve and, instead, continued to lose weight and grow weaker. He hummed and hawed then and said, "Well, now, it is hard to say. It might be one thing, such as the bite of a fly new to this district, or another, such as a germ settling in the intestine." Either way, how could one tell? There had been a similar case in Foligno and another in a faraway town. He recommended resting the beast and feeding her lightly. If the illness passed from her and God willed, she might live. Otherwise, she would surely die and there would be an end to her suffering.

After he had gone away, Pepino put his cropped head on Violetta's heaving flank and wept unrestrainedly. But then, when the storm, induced by the fear of losing his only companion in the world, had subsided, he knew what he must do. If there was no help for Violetta on earth, the appeal must be registered above immediately. His plan was nothing less than to take Violetta into the crypt beneath the lower church of the Basilica of St. Francis, where rested the remains of the Saint who had so dearly loved God's creations, including all the feathered and the four footed brothers and sisters who served Him. There he would beg St. Francis to heal her. Pepino had no doubt that the Saint would do so when he saw Violetta.

These things Pepino knew from Father Damico, who had a way of talking about St. Francis as though he were a living person who might still be encountered in his frayed cowl, bound with a hemp cord at the middle, merely by turning a corner of the Main Square in Assisi or by walking down one of the narrow, cobbled streets.

And besides, there was a precedent. Giani, his friend, the son of Niccolo the stableman, had taken his sick kitten into the crypt and asked St. Francis to heal her, and the cat had got well—at least half well, anyway, for her hind legs still dragged a little; but at least she had not died. Pepino felt that if Violetta were to die, it would be the end of everything for him.

Thereupon, with considerable difficulty, he persuaded the sick and shaky donkey to rise, and with urgings and caresses and minimum use of the stick, drove her through the crooked streets of Assisi and up the hill to the Basilica of St. Francis. At the beautiful twin portal of the lower church he respectfully asked Fra Bernard, who was on duty there, for permission to take Violetta down to St. Francis, so that she might be made well again.

Fra Bernard was a new monk, and, calling Pepino a young and impious scoundrel, ordered him and his donkey to be off. It

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was strictly forbidden to bring livestock into the church, and even to think of taking an ass into the crypt of St. Francis was a desecration. And besides, how did he imagine she would get down there when the narrow, winding staircase was barely wide enough to accommodate humans in single file, much less four footed animals? Pepino must be a fool as well as a shiftless rascal.

As ordered, Pepino retreated from the portal, his arm about Violetta's neck, and bethought himself of what he must do next to succeed in his purpose, for while he was disappointed at the rebuff he had received, he was not at all discouraged.

Despite the tragedy that had struck Pepino's early life and robbed him of his family, he really considered himself a most fortunate boy, compared with many, since he had acquired not only a heritage to aid him in earning a living but also an important precept by which to live.

This maxim, the golden key to success, had been left with Pepino, together with bars of chocolate, chewing gum, peanut brittle, soap, and other delights, by a corporal in the United States Army who had, in the six months he had been stationed in the vicinity of Assisi, been Pepino's demigod and hero. His name was Francis Xavier O'Halloran, and what he told Pepino before he departed out of his life forever was, "If you want to get ahead in this world, kid, don't never take no for an answer. Get it?" Pepino never forgot this important advice.

He thought now that his next step was clear; nevertheless, he went first to his friend and adviser, Father Damico, for confirmation.

Father Damico, who had a broad head, lustrous eyes, and shoulders shaped as though they had been especially designed to support the burdens laid upon them by his parishioners, said, "You are within your rights, my son, in taking your request to the Abbot, and it lies within his power to grant or refuse it."

There was no malice in the encouragement he thus gave Pepino, but it was also true that he was not loath to see the Abbot brought face to face with an example of pure and innocent faith. For in his private opinion that worthy man was too much concerned with the twin churches that formed the Basilica and the crypt as a tourist attraction. He, Father Damico, could not see why the child should not have his wish, but, of course, it was out of his jurisdiction. He was, however, curious about how the Abbot would react, even though he thought he knew in advance.

However, he did not impart his fears to Pepino and merely called after him as he was leaving, "And if the little one cannot be got in from above, there is another entrance from below, through the old church, only it has been walled up for a hundred years.

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But it could be opened. You might remind the Abbot when you see him. He knows where it is."

Pepino thanked him and went back alone to the Basilica and the monastery attached to it and asked permission to see the Abbot.

This personage was an accessible man, and even though he was engaged in a conversation with the Bishop, he sent for Pepino, who was led into the cloister gardens where he waited respectfully for the two great men to finish.

The two men were walking up and down, and Pepino wished it were the Bishop who was to say yea or nay to his request, as he looked the kindlier of the two, the Abbot appearing to have more the expression of a merchant than a priest. The boy pricked up his ears, because, as it so happened, they were speaking of St. Francis, and the Bishop was just remarking with a sigh, " He has been gone too long from this earth. The lesson of his life is plain to all who can read. But who in these times will pause to do so ? "

The Abbot said, " His tomb in the crypt attracts many to Assisi. But in a Holy Year, relics are even better. If we but had the tongue of the Saint, or a lock of his hair, or a fingernail."

The Bishop had a faraway look in his eyes, and he was shaking his head gently. " It is a message we are in need of, my dear Abbot, a message from a great heart that would speak to us across the gap of seven centuries to remind us of The Way." And here he paused and coughed, for he was a polite man and noticed that Pepino was waiting.

The Abbot turned also and said, " Ah yes, my son, what is it that I can do for you ? "

Pepino said, " Please, sir, my donkey Violetta is very sick. The Doctor Bartoli has said he can do nothing more and perhaps she will die. Please, I would like permission to take her into the tomb of Saint Francis and ask him to cure her. He loved all animals, and particularly little donkeys. I am sure he will make her well."

The Abbot looked shocked. " A donkey ! In the crypt ! How ever did you come to that idea ? "

Pepino explained about Giani and his sick kitten, while the Bishop turned away to hide a smile.

But the Abbot was not smiling. He asked, " How did this Giani succeed in smuggling a kitten into the tomb ? "

Since it was all over, Pepino saw no reason for not telling, and replied, " Under his coat, sir."

The Abbot made a mental note to warn the brothers to keep a sharper eye out for small boys or other persons with suspicious looking lumps under their outer clothing.

" Of course we can have no such goings on," he said. " The next thing you know, everyone would be coming, bringing a sick

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dog, or an ox, or a goat, or even a pig. And then where should we end up? A veritable sty."

"But, sir," Pepino pleaded, "no one need know. We would come and go so very quickly."

The Abbot's mind played. There was something touching about the boy—the bullet head, the enormous eyes, the jug-handle ears. And yet, what if he permitted it and the donkey then died, as seemed most likely if Dr. Bartoli had said there was no further hope? Word was sure to get about, and the shrine would suffer from it. He wondered what the Bishop was thinking and how *he* would solve the problem.

He equivocated: "And besides, even if we were to allow it, you would never be able to get your donkey around the turn at the bottom of the stairs. So, you see, it is quite impossible."

"But there is another entrance," Pepino said. "From the old church. It has not been used for a long time, but it could be opened just this once—couldn't it?"

The Abbot was indignant. "What are you saying—destroy church property? The entrance has been walled up for over a century, ever since the new crypt was built."

The Bishop thought he saw a way out and said gently to the boy, "Why do you not go home and pray to Saint Francis to assist you? If you open your heart to him and have faith, he will surely hear you."

"But it wouldn't be the same," Pepino cried, and his voice was shaking with the sobs that wanted to come. "I must take her where Saint Francis can see her. She isn't like any other old donkey—Violetta has the sweetest smile. She does not smile any more since she has been so ill. But perhaps she would, just once more for Saint Francis. And when he saw it he would not be able to resist her, and he would make her well. I know he would!"

The Abbot knew his ground now. He said, "I am sorry, my son, but the answer is no."

But even through his despair and the bitter tears he shed as he went away, Pepino knew that if Violetta was to live he must not take no for an answer.

"Who is there, then?" Pepino asked of Father Damico later. "Who is above the Abbot and my lord the Bishop who might tell them to let me take Violetta into the crypt?"

Father Damico's stomach felt cold as he thought of the dizzying hierarchy between Assisi and Rome. Nevertheless, he explained as best he could, concluding with, "And at the top is His Holiness, the Pope himself. Surely his heart would be touched by what has happened if you were able to tell him, for he is a great and good man. But he is busy with important and weighty

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affairs, Pepino, and it would be impossible for him to see you."

Pepino went back to Niccolo's stable, where he ministered to Violetta, fed and watered her and rubbed her muzzle a hundred times. Then he withdrew his money from the stone jar buried under the straw, and counted it. He had almost three hundred lire. A hundred of it he set aside and promised to his friend Giani if he would look after Violetta, while Pepino was gone, as if she were his own. Then he patted her once more, brushed away the tears that had started again at the sight of how thin she was, put on his jacket, and went out on the high road, where, using his thumb as he had learned from Corporal Francis Xavier O'Halloran, he got a lift in a lorry going to Foligno and the main road. He was on his way to Rome to see the Holy Father.

Never had any small boy looked quite so infinitesimal and forlorn as Pepino standing in the boundless and almost deserted, since it was early in the morning, St. Peter's Square. Everything towered over him—the massive dome of St. Peter's, the obelisk of Caligula, the Bernini colonnades. Everything contrived to make him look pinched and miserable in his bare feet, torn trousers, and ragged jacket. Never was a boy more overpowered, lonely, and frightened, nor carried a greater burden of unhappiness in his heart.

For now that he was at last in Rome, the gigantic proportions of the buildings and monuments, their awe and majesty, began to sap his courage, and he seemed to have a glimpse into the utter futility and hopelessness of his mission. And then there would arise in his mind a picture of the sad little donkey who did not smile any more, her heaving flanks and clouded eyes, and who would surely die unless he could find help for her. It was thoughts like these that enabled him finally to cross the piazza and timidly approach one of the smaller side entrances to the Vatican.

The Swiss guard, in his slashed red, yellow, and blue uniform, with his long halberd, looked enormous and forbidding. Nevertheless, Pepino edged up to him and said, "Please, will you take me to see the Pope? I wish to speak to him about my donkey Violetta, who is very ill and may die unless the Pope will help me."

The guard smiled, not unkindly, for he was used to these ignorant and innocent requests, and the fact that it came from a dirty, ragged little boy, with eyes like ink pools and a round head from which the ears stood out like the handles on a cream jug, made it all the more harmless. But, nevertheless, he was shaking his head as he smiled and then said that His Holiness was a very busy man and could not be seen. And the guard grounded his halberd with a thud and let it fall slantwise across the door to show that he meant business.

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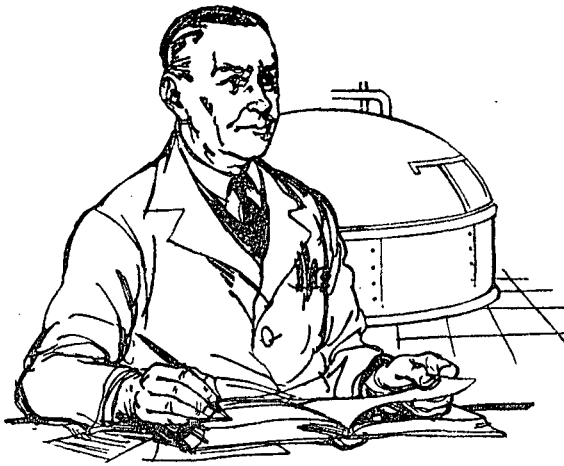

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Pepino backed away. What good was his precept in the face of such power and majesty? And yet the memory of what Corporal O'Halloran had said told him that he must return to the Vatican yet once again.

At the side of the piazza he saw an old woman sitting under an umbrella, selling little bouquets and nosegays of spring flowers—daffodils and jonquils, snowdrops and white narcissus, Parma violets and lilies of the valley, vari-coloured carnations, pansies, and tiny sweetheart roses. Some of the people visiting St. Peter's liked to place these on the altar of their favourite saint. The flowers were crisp and fresh from the market, and many of them had glistening drops of water still clinging to their petals.

Looking at them made Pepino think of home and Father Damico and what he had said of the love St. Francis had for flowers. Father Damico had the gift of making everything he thought and said sound like poetry. And Pepino came to the conclusion that if St. Francis, who had been a holy man, had been so fond of flowers, perhaps the Pope, who according to his position was even holier, would love them, too.

For fifty lire he bought a tiny bouquet in which a spray of lilies of the valley rose from a bed of dark violets and small red roses crowded next to yellow pansies all tied about with leaf and feather fern and paper lace.

From a stall where postcards and souvenirs were sold, he begged pencil and paper, and laboriously composed a note:

Dear and most sacred Holy Father: These flowers are for you. Please let me see you and tell you about my donkey Violetta who is dying, and they will not let me take her to see Saint Francis so that he may cure her. I live in the town of Assisi, but I have come all the way here to see you. Your loving Pepino.

Thereupon, he returned to the door, placed the bouquet and the note in the hand of the Swiss guard, and begged, "Please take these up to the Pope. I am sure that he will see me when he receives the flowers and reads what I have written."

The guard had not expected this. The child and the flowers had suddenly placed him in a dilemma from which he could not extricate himself in the presence of those large and trusting eyes. However, he was not without experience in handling such matters. He had only to place a colleague at his post, go to the Guard Room, throw the flowers and the note into the wastepaper basket, absent himself for a sufficient length of time, and then return to tell the boy that His Holiness thanked him for the gift of the flowers and regretted that press of important business made it impossible for him to grant him an audience.

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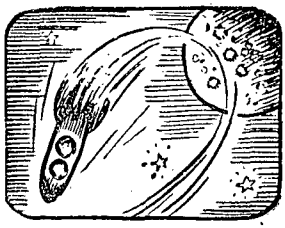

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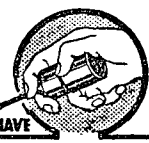

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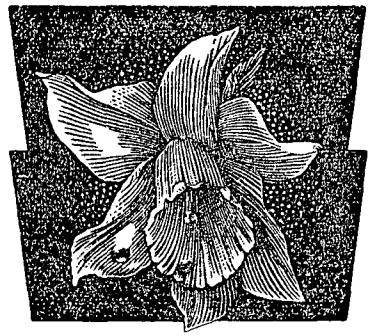

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This little subterfuge the guard put into motion at once; but when he came to completing the next-to-last act in it, he found to his amazement that somehow he could not bring himself to do it. There was the wastepaper basket, yawning to receive the offering, but the little nosegay seemed to be glued to his fingers. How gay, sweet, and cool the flowers were. What thoughts they brought to his mind of spring in the green valleys of his far-off canton of Luzern. He saw again the snow capped mountains of his youth, the little gingerbread houses, the grey, soft eyed cattle grazing in the blossom carpeted meadows, and he heard the heart-warming tinkling of their bells.

Dazed by what had happened to him, he left the Guard Room and wandered through the corridors, for he did not know where to go or what to do with his burden. He was eventually encountered by a busy little Monsignor, one of the vast army of clerks and secretaries employed in the Vatican, who paused, astonished at the sight of the burly guard helplessly contemplating a tiny posy.

And thus occurred the minor miracle whereby Pepino's plea and offering crossed the boundary in the palace that divided the mundane from the spiritual, the lay from the ecclesiastical.

For to the great relief of the guard, the Monsignor took over the burning articles that he had been unable to relinquish; and this priest they touched, too, as it is the peculiar power of flowers that while they are universal and spread their species over the world, they invoke in each beholder the dearest memories.

In this manner, the little bouquet passed on and upward from hand to hand, pausing briefly in the possession of the clerk of the Apostolic Chamber, the Privy Almoner, the Papal Sacristan, the Master of the Sacred Palaces, the Papal Chamberlain. The dew vanished from the flowers; they began to lose their freshness and to wilt, passing from hand to hand. And yet they retained their magic, the message of love and memories that rendered it impossible for any of these intermediaries to dispose of them.

Eventually, then, they were deposited with the missive that accompanied them on the desk of the man for whom they had been destined. He read the note and then sat there silently contemplating the blossoms. He closed his eyes for a moment, the better to entertain the picture that rose in his mind of a small Roman boy taken on a Sunday into the Alban Hills, where for the first time he saw violets growing wild.

When he opened his eyes at last, he said to his secretary, "Let the child be brought here. I will see him."

Thus it was that Pepino at last came into the presence of the Pope, seated at his desk in his office. Perched on the edge of a

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chair next to him, Pepino told the whole story about Violetta, his need to take her into the tomb of St. Francis, about the Abbot who was preventing him, and all about Father Damico, too, and the second entrance to the crypt, Violetta's smile, and his love for her—everything, in fact, that was in his heart and that now poured forth to the sympathetic man sitting quietly behind the desk.

And when, at the end of half an hour, he was ushered from the presence, he was quite sure he was the happiest boy in the world. For he had not only the blessing of the Pope but also, under his jacket, two letters, one addressed to the Abbot of Assisi and the other to Father Damico. No longer did he feel small and overwhelmed when he stepped out on to the square again past the astonished but delighted Swiss guard. He felt as though he could give one leap and a bound and fly back to his Violetta's side.

Nevertheless, he had to give heed to the more practical side of transportation. He enquired his way to a bus that took him to where the Via Flaminia became a country road stretching to the north, then plied his thumb backed by his eloquent eyes, and before nightfall of that day, with good luck, was home in Assisi.

After a visit to Violetta had assured him that she had been well looked after and at least was no worse than she had been before his departure, Pepino proudly went to Father Damico and presented his letters as he had been instructed to do.

The Father fingered the envelope for the Abbot and then, with a great surge of warmth and happiness, read the one addressed to himself. He said to Pepino, " Tomorrow we will take the Abbot's letter to him. He will summon masons and the old door will be broken down and you will be able to take Violetta into the tomb and pray there for her recovery. The Pope himself has approved it."

The Pope, of course, had not written the letters personally. They had been composed with considerable delight and satisfaction by the Cardinal-Secretary, backed by Papal authority, who said in his missive to Father Damico:

> *Surely the Abbot must know that in his lifetime the blessed Saint Francis was accompanied to chapel by a little lamb that used to follow him about Assisi. Is an* asinus *any less created by God because his coat is rougher and his ears longer?*

And he wrote also of another matter, which Father Damico imparted to Pepino in his own way.

He said, " Pepino, there is something you must understand before we go to see the Abbot. It is your hope that because of your faith in Saint Francis he will help you and heal your donkey. But had you thought, perhaps, that he who dearly cared for all of

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God's creatures might come to love Violetta so greatly that he would wish to have her at his side in Eternity?"

A cold terror gripped Pepino as he listened. He managed to say, "No, Father, I had not thought—"

The priest continued: "Will you go to the crypt only to ask, Pepino, or will you also, if necessary, be prepared to give?"

Everything in Pepino cried out against the possibility of losing Violetta, even to someone as beloved as St. Francis. Yet when he raised his stricken face and looked into the lustrous eyes of Father Damico, there was something in their depths that gave him the courage to whisper, "I will give—if I must. But, oh, I hope he will let her stay with me just a little longer."

The clink of the stonemason's pick rang again and again through the vaulted chamber of the lower church, where the walled-up door of the passageway leading to the crypt was being removed. Near by waited the Abbot and his friend the Bishop, Father Damico, and Pepino, large-eyed, pale, and silent. The boy kept his arms about the neck of Violetta and his face pressed to hers. The little donkey was very shaky on her legs and could barely stand.

The Abbot watched humbly and impassively while broken bricks and clods of mortar fell as the breach widened and the freed current of air from the passage swirled the plaster dust in clouds. He was a just man for all his weakness, and had invited the Bishop to witness his rebuke.

A portion of the wall proved obstinate. The mason attacked the archway at the side to weaken its support. Then the loosened masonry began to tumble again. A narrow passageway was effected, and through the opening they could see the distant flicker of the candles placed at the altar wherein rested the remains of St. Francis.

Pepino stirred towards the opening. Or was it Violetta who had moved nervously, frightened by the unaccustomed place and noises? Father Damico said, "Wait," and Pepino held her; but the donkey's uncertain feet slipped on the rubble and then lashed out in panic, striking the side of the archway where it had been weakened. A brick fell out. A crack appeared.

Father Damico leaped and pulled boy and animal out of the way as, with a roar, the side of the arch collapsed, laying bare a piece of the old wall and the hollow behind it before everything vanished in a cloud of dust.

But when the dust settled, the Bishop, his eyes starting from his head, was pointing to something that rested in a niche of the hollow just revealed. It was a small grey leaden box. Even from there they could see the year 1226, when St. Francis died, engraved on the side, and the large initial "F."

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The Bishop's breath came out like a sigh. "Ah, could it be? The legacy of Saint Francis! Fra Leo mentions it. It was hidden away centuries ago, and no one has ever been able to find it since."

The Abbot said hoarsely, "The contents! Let us see what is inside—it may be valuable!"

The Bishop hesitated. "Perhaps we had best wait. For this is in itself a miracle, this finding."

But Father Damico, who was a poet and to whom St. Francis was a living spirit, cried, "Open it, I beg of you! All who are here are humble. Surely, Heaven's plan has guided us to it."

The Abbot held the lantern. The mason with his careful, honest workman's hands deftly loosed the bindings and pried the lid of the airtight box. It opened with an ancient creaking of its hinge and revealed what had been placed there more than seven centuries before.

There was a piece of hempen cord, knotted as though, perhaps, once it had been worn about the waist. Caught in the knot, as fresh as though it had grown but yesterday, was a single sprig of wheat. Dried and preserved, there lay, too, the stem and starry flower of a mountain primrose and, next to it, one downy feather from a tiny meadow bird.

Silently the men stared at these objects from the past to try to read their meaning, and Father Damico wept, for to him they brought the vivid figure of the Saint, half blinded, worn and fragile, the cord knotted at his waist, singing, striding through a field of wheat. The flower might have been the first discovered by him after a winter's snow, and addressed as "Sister Cowslip," and praised for her tenderness and beauty. As though he were transported there, Father Damico saw the little field bird fly trustingly to Francis' shoulder and chirrup and nestle there and leave a feather in his hand. His heart was so full he thought he could not bear it.

The Bishop, too, was close to tears as, in his own way, he interpreted what they had found. "Ah, what could be clearer than the message of the Saint? Poverty, love, and faith. This is his bequest to all of us."

Pepino said, "Please, lords and sirs, may Violetta and I go into the crypt now?"

They had forgotten him. Now they started up from their contemplation of the touching relics that were destined some day to gladden the hearts of millions.

Father Damico cleared the tears from his eyes. The doorway was freed now, and there was room for boy and donkey to pass.

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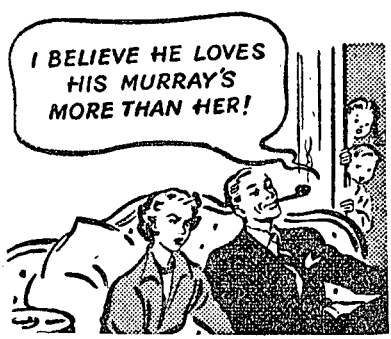

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"Ah, yes," he said. "Yes, Pepino. You may enter now. And may God go with you."

The hoofs of the donkey went sharply *clip-clop, clip-clop* on the ancient flagging of the passageway. Pepino did not support her now, but walked beside her, one hand just resting lightly and lovingly on her neck. His round, cropped head with the outstanding ears was held high, and his shoulders were bravely squared.

And to Father Damico it seemed, as they passed, whether because of the uneven light and the dancing shadows, or because he wished it so, that the ghost, the merest wisp, the barest suspicion of a smile had returned to the mouth of Violetta.

Thus the watchers saw boy and donkey silhouetted against the flickering oil lamps and altar candles of the crypt as they went forward to complete their pilgrimage of faith.

* * *

ANSWERS to SPORTING TIMES on page 10

1. *Toad of Toad Hall, in "The Wind in the Willows," by Kenneth Grahame.*
2. *Mr. Winkle, at the skating party, in "The Pickwick Papers," by Charles Dickens.*
3. *Alice, playing croquet with a flamingo and a hedgehog, in "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," by Lewis Carroll.*
4. *Philip, in the story "The Basement Room," by Graham Greene.*
5. *archy, the biographer of mehitabel the cat, in Don Marquis' "archy's life of mehitabel."*
6. *Young Lochinvar, in the ballad "Lochinvar," by Sir Walter Scott.*
7. *The sailors in the traditional song, "The Rio Grande."*
8. *Sir Ector, in T. H. White's "The Sword in the Stone."*
9. *Peter, in "The Wooden Horse," by Eric Williams.*

* * *

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 160

Across. 1, Forearms. 5, Crutch. 9, Allegory. 10, Sconce. 11, Tantalus. 13, Signal. 14, Rum. 16, Petals. 19, Contour. 20, Laid up. 21, Hem. 26, Petard. 27, Saraband. 28, Horace. 29, Hornpipe. 30, Dulcet. 31, Instance.

Down. 1, Feasts. 2, Ruling. 3, Aegean. 4, Murmur. 6, Receiver. 7, Tenon saw. 8, Heedless. 12, Surtees. 15, Top. 16, Pug. 17, Slipshod. 18, Littoral. 19, Curricle. 22, Maroon. 23, Gannet. 24, Malign. 25, Adhere.

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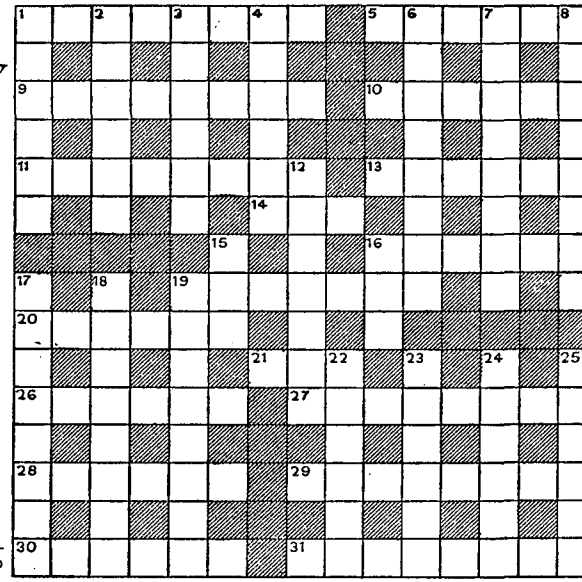
ARGOSY CROSS WORD

Solution on page 159



CLUES

Across

1 Quadruplicate weapons? (8).

5 Not much help for a lame conclusion (6).

9 Mrs. Malaprop's was headstrong on the banks of the Nile (8).

10 How to hold the candle—it's concentric? (6).

11 Classical victim of Prohibition (8).

13 Notable? Put out more flags and let us know (6).

14 Canna the egg and I muck in for a drink here in Scotland? (3).

16 Pleats for a floral centre (6).

19 A hundred people en route? They'll need a map (7).

20 Out of action—with face reversed! (4, 2).

21 Invariably a borderline case (3).

26 The pet, ardent as he is, might cause fireworks (6).

27 A girl makes music at the head of the dance (8).

28 What ho with a contest to find the poet! (6).

29 Instrument to accompany this dance? (8).

30 I cease to be ductile but become sweet (6).

31 i.e. an insect (8).

Down

1 Eats writ large (6).

2 The party line (6).

3 Homer's "wine-dark sea," probably (6).

4 "And bending down beside the glowing bars, —, a little sadly, how love fled" (W. B. Yeats) (6).

6 He's certainly on the wrong side of the fence! (8).

7 Swan note—emitted by this tool? (5, 3).

8 Oh, so irresponsible (8).

12 His hero went for rural rides, but certainly not with Cobbett (7).

15 "He wished all men as rich as he (And he was rich as rich could be), So to the—of every tree Promoted everybody" (W. S. Gilbert) (3).

16 Not a boxer, though as popular with his followers (3).

17 Do old ships get like this? (8).

18 Almost literally the Dalmatian coast (8).

19 Vehicle which keeps its course, no doubt (8).

22 Coloured alarum? (6).

23 Annie get your gun? Alas, only the bird when I goes! (6).

24 To do so may indeed be laming (6)

25 Stick at the top of the Agony Column (6).

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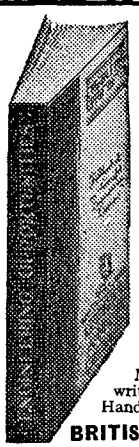

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